QUEECHY

ELIZABETH WETHERELL

Francie,
August 17th. 1916.

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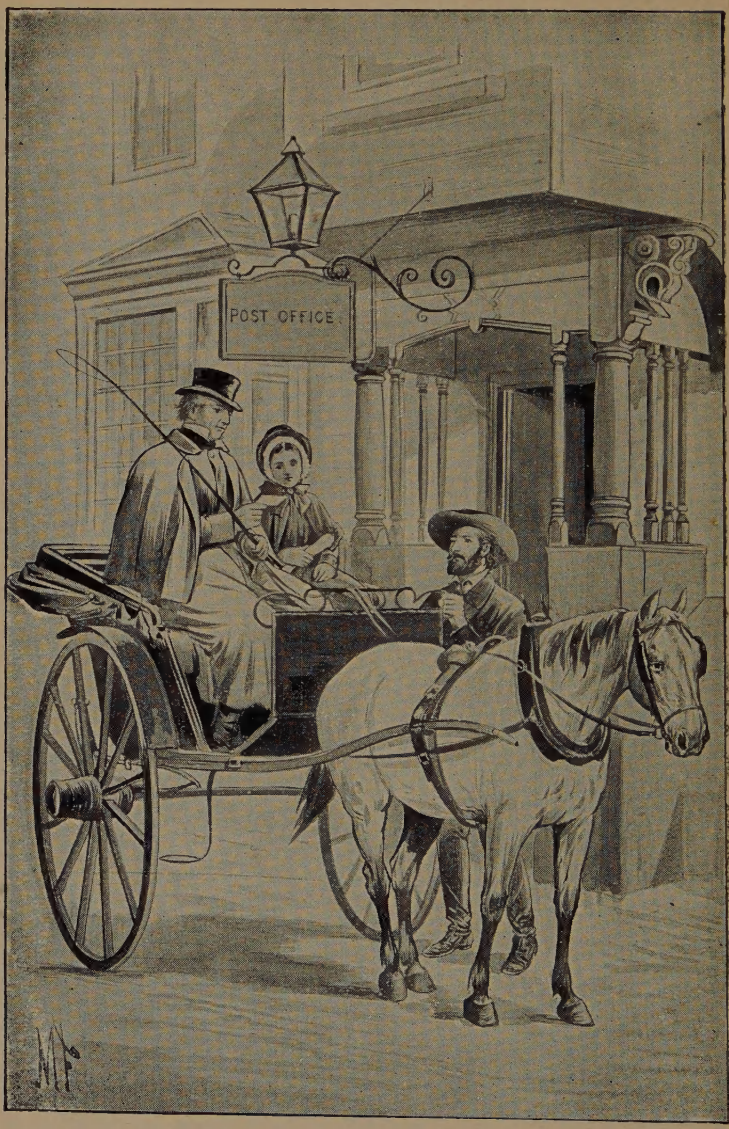

"'I declare, Miss Fleda Ruggan, care of E. Ruggan, Esq.!'"

Queechy] [*Chapter 1.*

QUEECHY

BY

ELIZABETH WETHERELL

Author of "The Wide, Wide World," "The Old Helmet," etc., etc.

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON, MELBOURNE AND TORONTO

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NOTE.

Whatever credit may be due to the bits of poetry in this volume, it is not due to the writer of the rest. She has them only by gift—not the gift of nature.

QUEECHY.

CHAPTER I.

A single cloud on a sunny day
When all the rest of heaven is clear,
A frown upon the atmosphere,
That hath no business to appear,
When skies are blue and earth is gay.—*Byron.*

"COME, dear grandpa! the old mare and the waggon are at the gate, all ready."

"Well, dear!" responded a cheerful hearty voice, "they must wait a bit; I haven't got my hat yet."

"Oh, I'll get that."

And the little speaker, a girl of ten or eleven years old, dashed past the old gentleman and running along the narrow passage which led to his room soon returned with the hat in her hand.

"Yes, dear; but that ain't all. I must put on my great-coat, and I must look and see if I can find any money——"

"Oh, yes, for the post-office. Cynthy, won't you come and help grandpa on with his great-coat? And I'll go out and keep watch of the old mare till you're ready."

A needless caution. For the old mare, though spirited enough for her years, had seen some fourteen or fifteen of them, and was in no sort of danger of running away. She stood in what was called the back meadow, just without the little paling fence that enclosed a small courtyard round the house. Around this courtyard rich pasture-fields lay on every side, the high road cutting through them not more than a hundred or two feet from the house.

The little girl planted herself on the outside of the paling, and setting her back to it eyed the old mare with great contentment; for besides other grounds for security as to her quiet behaviour, one of the men employed about the farm, who had harnessed the equipage, was at the moment busied in putting some clean straw in the bottom of the vehicle.

"Watkins," said the child presently to this person, "here is a strap that is just ready to come unbuckled."

"What do you know about straps and buckles?" said the man rather grumly. But he came round, however, to see what she meant, and while he drew the one and fastened the other took special good care not to let Fleda know that her watchful eyes had probably saved the whole riding party from ruin; as the loosing of the strap would of necessity have brought on a trial of the old mare's nerves which not all her philosophy could have been expected to meet. Fleda was satisfied to see the buckle made fast, and that Watkins, roused by her hint or by the cause of it, afterwards took a somewhat careful look over the whole establishment. In high glee then she climbed to her seat in the little waggon, and her grandfather coming out coated and hatted with some difficulty mounted to his place beside her.

"I think Watkins might have taken the trouble to wash the waggon without hurting himself," said Fleda; "it is all speckled with mud since last time."

"Ha'n't he washed it?" said the old gentleman in a tone of displeasure. "Watkins!"

"Well."

"Why didn't you wash the waggon, as I told you?"

"I did."

"It's all over slosh."

"That's Mr. Didenhover's work—he had it out day 'fore yesterday; and if you want it cleaned, Mr. Ringgan, you must speak to him about it. Mr. Didenhover may file his own doings; it's more than I'm going to."

The old gentleman made no answer, except to acquaint the mare with the fact of his being in readiness to set out. A shade of annoyance for a moment was upon his face; but the gate opening from the meadow upon the high road had hardly swung back upon its hinges after letting them out when he recovered the calm sweetness of demeanour that was habitual with him, and seemed as well as his little granddaughter to have given care the go-by for the time.

"Where are we going first, grandpa?—to the post office?"

"Just there!"

"How pleasant it is to go there always, isn't it, grandpa? You have the paper to get, and I—I don't very often get a letter, but I have always the *hope* of getting one; and that's something. Maybe I'll have one to-day, grandpa?"

"We'll see. It's time those cousins of yours wrote to you."

"Oh, *they* don't write to me—it's only Aunt Lucy; I never had a letter from a single one of them except once from little Hugh—don't you remember, grandpa? I should think he must be a very nice little boy, shouldn't you?"

"Little boy? why, I guess he is about as big as you are, Fleda—he is eleven years old, ain't he?"

"Yes, but I am past eleven, you know, grandpa, and I am a little girl."

This reasoning being unanswerable, Mr. Ringgan only bade the old mare trot on.

It was a pleasant day in autumn. So Mr. Ringgan and his little granddaughter both felt it to be. For some distance the grounds on either hand the road were part of the old gentleman's farm; and many a remark was exchanged between him and Fleda as to the excellence or hopefulness of this or that crop or piece of soil; Fleda entering into all his enthusiasm and reasoning of clover leys and cockle, and the proper harvesting of Indian corn and other like matters, with no lack of interest or intelligence. But this was not fated to be a ride of unbroken pleasure.

"Why, what are those bars down for?" she said, as they came up with a field of winter grain. "Somebody's been in here with a waggon. Oh, grandpa! Mr. Didenhover has let the Shakers have my butternuts!—the butternuts that you told him they mustn't have."

The old gentleman drew up his horse. "So he has!" said he.

Their eyes were upon the far end of the deep lot, where at the edges of one of the pieces of woodland spoken of, a picturesque group of men and boys in frocks and broad-brimmed white hats were busied in filling their waggon under a clump of the now thin and yellow-leaved butternut trees.

"The scoundrel!" said Mr. Ringgan under his breath.

"Would it be any use, grandpa, for me to jump down and run and tell them you don't want them to take the butternuts? I shall have so few."

"No, dear, no," said her grandfather, "they have got 'em about all by this time; the mischief's done. Didenhover meant to let 'em have 'em unknown to me, and pocket the pay himself. Get up!"

Fleda drew a long breath, and gave a hard look at the distant waggon, where *her* butternuts were going in by handfuls. She said no more.

It was but a few fields further on that the old gentleman came to a sudden stop again.

"Ain't there some of my sheep over yonder there, Fleda, along with Squire Thornton's?"

"I don't know, grandpa," said Fleda,—"I can't see—yes, I do see—yes, they are; I see the mark.'

"I thought so!" said Mr. Ringgan bitterly; "I told Didenhover, only three days ago, that if he didn't make up that fence, the sheep would be out. Ah, well!" said he, shaking the reins to make the mare move on again, "it's all of a piece. Everything goes; I can't help it!"

"Why do you keep him, grandpa, if he don't behave right?" Fleda ventured to ask gently.

"'Cause I can't get rid of him, dear," Mr. Ringgan answered rather shortly.

And till they got to the post office he seemed in a disagreeable kind of muse, which Fleda did not choose to break in upon. So the mile and a half was driven in sober silence.

"Shall I get out and go in, grandpa?" said Fleda, when he drew up before the house.

"No, deary," said he in his usual kind tone; "you sit still. Holloa, there! Good-day, Mr. Sampion! Have you got anything for me?"

The man disappeared, and came out again.

"There's your paper, grandpa," said Fleda.

"Ah, and something else," said Mr. Ringgan. "I declare!—'Miss Fleda Ringgan, care of E. Ringgan, Esq'! There, dear, there it is."

"Paris!" exclaimed Fleda, as she clasped the letter and both her hands together. The butternuts and Mr. Didenhover were forgotten at last. The letter could not be read in the jolting of the waggon; but, as Fleda said, it was all the pleasanter, for she had the expectation of it the whole way home.

"Where are we going now, grandpa?"

"To Queechy Run."

Queechy Run was a very little village about half a mile from Mr. Ringgan's house. It boasted, however, a decent brick church of some size, a school-house, a lawyer's office, a grocery store, a dozen or two of dwelling-houses, and a post office; though for some reason or other Mr. Ringgan always chose to have his letters come through the Sattlersville post office, a mile and a half further off. At the door of the lawyer's office Mr. Ringgan again stopped, and again shouted, "Holloa!"

"Good-day, sir. Is Mr. Jolly within?"

"He is, sir."

"Will you ask him to be so good as to step here a moment? I cannot very well get out."

Mr. Jolly was a comfortable-looking little man, smooth and sleek, pleasant and plausible, reasonably honest, too, as the world goes. He came fresh and brisk to the side of the waggon, with that uncommon hilarity which people sometimes assume when they have a disagreeable matter on hand that must be spoken of.

"Good morning, sir! Fine day, Mr. Jolly."

"Beautiful day, sir! How do you do, Mr. Ringgan?"

"Why, sir, I never was better in my life, barring this lameness, that disables me very much. I can't go about and see to things any more as I used to. However, we must expect evils at my time of life. I don't complain; I have a great deal to be thankful for."

"Yes, sir; we have a great deal to be thankful for," said Mr. Jolly rather abstractedly, and patting the old mare.

"Have you seen that fellow McGowan?" said Mr. Ringgan abruptly, and in a lower tone.

"I have seen him," said Mr. Jolly, coming back from the old mare to business.

"He's a hard customer, I guess; ain't he?"

"He's as ugly a cur as ever was whelped!"

"What does he say?"

"Says he must have it."

"Did you tell him what I told you?"

"I told him, sir, that you had not got the returns from your farm that you expected this year, owing to one thing and 'nother, and that you couldn't make up the cash for him all at once, and that he would have to wait a spell; but that he'd be sure to get it in the long run. Nobody ever suffered by Mr. Ringgan yet, as I told him."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, he was altogether refractible."

"What did he say?"

"He swore he wouldn't wait a day longer; said he'd waited already six months."

"He has so. I couldn't meet the last payment. There's a year's rent due now. I can't help it; there needn't have been an hour, if I could go about and attend to things myself. I have been altogether disappointed in that Didenhover."

"I expect you have."

"What do you suppose he'll do, Mr. Jolly?—McGowan, I mean."

"I expect he'll do what the law'll let him, Mr. Ringgan; I don't know what'll hinder him."

"It's a worse turn than I thought my infirmities would ever play me," said the old gentleman, after a short pause; "first to lose the property altogether, and then not to be permitted to wear out what is left of life in the old place; there won't be much."

"So I told him, Mr. Ringgan. I put it to him. Says I, 'Mr. McGowan, it's a cruel, hard business; there ain't a man in town that wouldn't leave Mr. Ringgan the shelter of his own roof as long as he wants any, and think it a pleasure, if the rent was anyhow.'"

"Well, well!" said the old gentleman, with a mixture of dignity and bitterness; "it doesn't much matter. My head will find a shelter somehow, above ground or under it. The Lord will provide."

Fleda had turned away her head, and tried not to hear when the lowered tones of the speakers seemed to say that she was one too many in the company. But she could not help catching a few bits of the conversation, and a few bits were generally enough for Fleda's wit to work upon; she had a singular knack of putting loose ends of talk together. If more had been wanting, the tones of her grandfather's voice would have filled up every gap in the meaning of the scattered words that came to her ear. It was a chill upon all the rosy joys and hopes of a most joyful and hopeful little nature.

The old mare was in motion again, but Fleda no longer cared or had the curiosity to ask where they were going. Tears were quietly running down her cheeks, and falling on her sleeve. She dared not lift her handkerchief nor turn her face towards her grandfather, lest they should catch his eye. Her grandfather!—could it be possible that he must be turned out of his old home in his old age? Mr. Jolly seemed to think it might be, and her grandfather seemed to think it must. Leave the old house! But where would he go? Son or daughter he had none left; resources he could have none, or this need not happen. Work he could not; be dependent upon the charity of any kin or friend, she knew he would never.

Eventually she broke the silence by asking if they were going home, to which he replied—

"No, I want to stop a minute at Uncle Joshua's."

Uncle Joshua was a brother-in-law of Mr. Ringgan, a substantial farmer and very well to do in the world. He was found in a field with his men, loading an enormous basket-waggon with cornstalks. At Mr. Ringgan's shout he got over the fence and came to the waggon-side. His face shewed sense and shrewdness, but nothing of the open nobility of mien which nature had stamped upon that of his brother.

"Fine morning, eh?" said he. "I'm getting in my corn-stalks."

"So I see," said Mr. Ringgan. "How do you find the new way of curing them answer?"

"Fine as ever you see. Sweet as a nut. How are you going to be off for fodder this winter?"

"It's more than I can tell you," said Mr. Ringgan. "There ought to be more than plenty; but Didenhover contrives to bring everything out at the wrong end. I wish I was rid of him."

"He'll never get a berth with *me*, I can tell you," said Uncle Joshua, laughing.

"Brother," said Mr. Ringgan, lowering his tone again, "have you any loose cash you could let me have for six months or so?"

Uncle Joshua took a meditative look down the road, turned a quid of tobacco in his cheek, and finally brought his eyes again to Mr. Ringgan and answered—

"Well, I don't see as I can," said he. "You see, Josh is just agoing to set up for himself at Kenton, and he'll want some help of me; and I expect that'll be about as much as I can manage to lay my hands on."

"Do you know who has any that he would be likely to lend?" said Mr. Ringgan.

"No, I don't. For your rent, eh?"

"Yes, for my rent. The farm brings me in nothing but my living. That Didenhover is ruining me, brother Joshua."

"He's feathering his own nest, I reckon."

"You may swear to that."

"Whew!—well—I wish you well rid of him; and don't make such another bargain again. Good-day to ye!"

It was with a keen pang that little Fleda saw the down-hearted look of her grandfather as again he gave the old mare notice to move on. A few minutes passed in deep thought on both sides.

"Grandpa," said Fleda, "wouldn't Mr. Jolly perhaps know of somebody that might have some money to lend?"

"I declare!" said the old gentleman after a moment, "that's not a bad thought. I wonder I didn't have it myself."

They turned about, and without any more words measured back their way to Queechy Run. Mr. Jolly came out again, brisk and alert as ever; but after seeming to rack his brains in search of any actual or possible money-lender was obliged to confess that it was in vain; he could not think of one.

"But I'll tell you what, Mr. Ringgan," he concluded, "I'll turn it over in my mind to-night and see if I can think of anything that'll do, and if I can I'll let you know. If we hadn't such a nether millstone to deal with, it would be easy enough to work it somehow."

So they set forth homewards again.

"Cheer up, dear!" said the old gentleman heartily, laying one hand on his little granddaughter's lap, "it will be arranged somehow. Don't you worry your little head with business God will take care of us."

"Yes, grandpa!" said the little girl, looking up with an instant sense of relief at these words; and then looking down again immediately burst into tears.

CHAPTER II.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it?
Ha' you mark'd but the fall o' the snow,
Before the soil hath smutch'd it?—*Ben Jonson.*

WHERE a ray of light can enter the future, a child's hope can find a way—a way that nothing less airy and spiritual can travel. By the time they reached their own door, Fleda's spirits were at par again.

"I am very glad we have got home, aren't you, grandpa?" she said as she jumped down. "I'm so hungry. I guess we are both of us ready for supper; don't you think so?"

She hurried upstairs to take off her wrappings, and then came down to the kitchen, where, standing on the broad hearth and warming herself at the blaze, with all the old associations of comfort settling upon her heart, it occurred to her that foundations so established *could not* be shaken. The blazing fire seemed to welcome her home and bid her dismiss fear; her grandfather was in his cushioned chair at the corner of the hearth, reading the newspaper, as she had seen him a thousand times; just in the same position, with that collected air of grave enjoyment, one leg crossed over the other, settled back in his chair but upright, and scanning the columns with an intent but most uncareful face. A face it was that always had a rare union of fineness and placidness. The table stood spread in the usual place, warmth and comfort filled every corner of the room, and Fleda began to feel as if she had been in an uncomfortable dream, which was very absurd, but from which she was very glad she had awoke.

"What have you got in this pitcher, Cynthy?" said she. "Muffins! Oh, let me bake them, will you? I'll bake them."

"Now, Flidda," said Cynthy, "just you be quiet. There ain't no place where you can bake 'em. I'm just going to clap 'em in the reflector; that's the shortest way I can take to do 'em. You keep yourself out o' muss."

"They won't be muffins if you bake 'em in the reflector, Cynthy; they aren't half so good. Ah, do let me! I won't make a bit of muss."

"Where'll you do 'em?"

"In grandpa's room, if you'll just clean off the top of the stove for me. Now do, Cynthy!"

"It'll make an awful smoke, Flidda; you'll fill your grandpa's room with the smoke, and he won't like that, I guess."

"Oh, he won't mind it," said Fleda.

There was nothing more to be said; and while Fleda in triumph put on an apron and made her preparations, Cynthy on her part, and with a very good grace, went to get ready the stove; which, being a wood-stove, made of sheet-iron, with a smooth even top, afforded, in Fleda's opinion, the very best possible field for muffins to come to their perfection.

A little while had passed, when there came a knock at the door, and Mr. Ringgan's "Come in!" was followed by the entrance of two strangers, young, well-dressed, and comely. They wore the usual badges of seekers after game, but their guns were left outside.

The old gentleman's look of grave expectancy told his want of enlightenning.

"I fear you do not remember me, Mr. Ringgan," said the foremost of the two, coming up to him. "My name is Rossitur—Charles Rossitur—a cousin of your little granddaughter. I have only——"

"Oh, I know you now!" said Mr. Ringgan, rising and grasping his hand heartily. "You are very welcome, sir. How do you do? I recollect you perfectly, but you took me by surprise. How do you do, sir? Sit down—sit down."

And the old gentleman had extended his frank welcome to the second of his visitors almost before the first had time to utter, "My friend, Mr. Carleton."

"I couldn't imagine what was coming upon me," said Mr. Ringgan cheerfully; "for you weren't anywhere very near my thoughts, and I don't often see much of the gay world that is passing by me. You have grown since I saw you last, Mr. Rossitur. You are studying at West Point, I believe?"

"No, sir; I *was* studying there, but I had the pleasure of bringing that to an end last June."

"Ah! Well, what are you now?—not a cadet any longer, I suppose?"

"No, sir; we hatch out of that shell lieutenants."

"Hum! And do you intend to remain in the army?"

"Certainly, sir—that is my purpose and hope."

"Your mother would not like that, I should judge. I do not understand how she ever made up her mind to let you become that thing which hatches out into a lieutenant. Gentle creatures she and her sister both were. How was it, Mr. Rossitur? Were you a wild young gentleman that wanted training?"

"I have had it, sir, whether I wanted it or no."

"Hum! How is he, Mr. Carleton?—sober enough to command men?"

"I have not seen him tried, sir," said this gentleman, smiling; "but from the inconsistency of the orders he issues to his dogs I doubt it exceedingly."

"Why, Carleton would have no orders issued to them at all, I believe," said young Rossitur; "he has been saying 'hush' to me all day."

The old gentleman laughed in a way that indicated intelligence with one of the speakers—which, appeared not.

"So you've been following the dogs to-day," said he. "Been successful?"

"Not a bit of it," said Rossitur. "Whether we got on the wrong grounds, or didn't get on the right ones, or the dogs didn't mind their business, or there was nothing to fire at, I don't know; but we lost our patience and got nothing in exchange."

"Speak for yourself," said the other. "I assure you I was sensible of no ground of impatience while going over such a superb country as this."

"It *is* a fine country," said Mr. Ringgan, "all this tract; and I ought to know it, for I have hunted every mile of it for many a mile round. There used to be more game than partridges in these hills when I was a young man—bears, and wolves, and deer, and now and then a panther, to say nothing of rattlesnakes."

"That last-mentioned is an irregular sort of game, is it not?" said Mr. Carleton, smiling.

"Well, game is what you choose to make it," said the old gentleman. "I have seen worse day's sport than I saw once when we were out after rattelsnakes and nothing else."

"My little cousin is well, I hope," said Mr. Rossitur.

"She? yes, bless her! she is always well. Where is she? Fairy, where are you? Cynthy, just call Elfleda here."

"She's just in the thick of the muffins, Mr. Ringgan."

"Let the muffins burn! Call her."

Miss Cynthia accordingly opened a little way the door of the passage, from which a blue stifling smoke immediately made its way into the room, and called out to Fleda, whose little voice was heard faintly responding from the distance.

"It's a wonder she can hear through all that smoke," remarked Cynthia.

"She," said Mr. Ringgan, laughing; "she's playing cook or housekeeper in yonder, getting something ready for tea. She's a busy little spirit, if ever there was one. Ah! there she is. Come here, Fleda; here's your cousin Rossitur, from West Point, and Mr. Carleton."

Fleda made her appearance, flushed with the heat of the stove and the excitement of turning the muffins, and the little iron spatula she used for that purpose still in her hand; and a fresh and larger puff of the unsavoury blue smoke accompanied her entrance. She came forward, however, gravely, and without the slightest embarrassment, to receive her cousin's somewhat unceremonious "How do, Fleda?" and, keeping the spatula still in one hand, shook hands with him with the other. But at the very different manner in which

Mr. Carleton *rose* and greeted her, the flush on Fleda's cheek deepened, and she cast down her eyes and stepped back to her grandfather's side with the demureness of a young lady just undergoing the ceremony of presentation.

"You come upon us out of a cloud, Fleda," said her cousin. "Is that the way you have acquired a right to the name of Fairy?"

"I am sure, no," said Mr. Carleton.

Fleda did not lift up her eyes, but her mounting colour showed that she understood both speeches.

"Because if you are in general such a misty personage," Mr. Rossitur went on half laughing, "I would humbly recommend a choice of incense."

"Oh, I forgot to open the windows!" exclaimed Fleda ingenuously. "Cynthy, won't you please go and do it? and take this with you," said she, holding out the spatula.

"She is as good a fairy as *I* want to see," said her grandfather, passing his arm fondly round her. "She carries a ray of sunshine in her right hand, and that's as magic-working a wand as any fairy ever wielded; hey, Mr. Carleton?"

Mr. Carleton bowed. But whether the sunshine of affection in Fleda's glance and smile at her grandfather made him feel that she was above a compliment, or whether it put the words out of his head, certain it is that he uttered none.

"So you've had bad success to-day?" continued Mr. Ringgan. "Where have you been? and what after? Partridges?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Carleton; "my friend Rossitur promised me a rare bag of woodcock, and led me over a large extent of meadow and swamp land this morning without flushing a single bird."

"Meadow and swamp land?" said the old gentleman. "Whereabouts?"

"A mile or more beyond the little village over here where we left our horses," said Rossitur. "We beat the ground well, but there were no signs of them even."

"Ah, it was too wet," said Mr. Ringgan. "I could have told you that. There has been too much rain. You wouldn't find a woodcock in that swamp after such a day as we had a few days ago. But, gentlemen, if you are not discouraged with your day's experience, and want to try again, *I'll* put you in a way to get as many woodcock as will satisfy you. If you'll come here to-morrow morning, I'll go out with you far enough to show you the way to the best ground *I* know

for shooting that game in all this country. You'll have a good chance for partridges, too, in the course of the day ; and that ain't bad eating when you can't get better ; is it, Fairy ? " he said, with a sudden smiling appeal to the little girl at his side. Her answer again was only an intelligent glance.

The young sportsmen both thanked him, and promised to take advantage of his kind offer.

" I wish I was a little younger, and I'd take my gun and go along with you myself," said the old gentleman pleasantly ; " but," he added, sighing, " there is a time for everything, and my time for sporting is past."

" You have no right to complain, sir," said Mr. Carleton, with a meaning glance and smile which the old gentleman took in excellent good part.

" Well," he said, looking half proudly, half tenderly, upon the little demure figure at his side, " I don't say that I have. I hope I thank God for His mercies, and am happy. But in this world, Mr. Carleton, there is hardly a blessing but what draws a care after it. Well, well, these things will all be arranged for us ! "

It was plain, however, even to a stranger, that there was some subject of care, not vague nor undefined, pressing upon Mr. Ringgan's mind as he said this.

" Have you heard from my mother lately, Fleda ? " said her cousin.

" Why, yes," said Mr. Ringgan ; " she had a letter from her only to-day. You ha'n't read it yet, have you, Fleda ? "

" No, grandpa," said the little girl ; " you know I've been busy."

" Ay," said the old gentleman ; " why couldn't you let Cynthia bake the cakes, and not roast yourself over the stove till you're as red as a turkey-cock ? "

" This morning I was like a chicken," said Fleda, laughing, " and now like a turkey-cock ? "

" Shall I tell mamma, Fleda," said young Rossitur, " that you put off reading her letter to bake muffins ? "

Fleda answered, without looking up, " Yes, if he pleased."

" What do you suppose she will think ? "

" I don't know."

" She will think that you love muffins better than her."

" No," said Fleda, quietly but firmly, " she will not think that, because it isn't true."

The gentlemen laughed, but Mr. Carleton declared that Fleda's reasoning was unanswerable.

"Well, I will see you to-morrow," said Mr. Rossitur, "after you have read the letter, for I suppose you will read it some time. You should have had it before—it came enclosed to me—but I forgot, unaccountably, to mail it to you till a few days ago."

"It will be just as good now, sir," said Mr. Ringgan.

"There is a matter in it though," said Rossitur, "about which my mother has given me a charge. We will see you to-morrow. It was for that partly we turned out of our way this evening."

"I am very glad you did," said Mr. Ringgan. "I hope your way will bring you here often. Won't you stay and try some of these same muffins before you go?"

But this was declined, and the gentlemen departed; Fleda, it must be confessed, seeing nothing in the whole leave-taking but Mr. Carleton's look and smile. The muffins were a very tame affair after it.

When supper was over she sat down fairly to her letter, and read it twice through before she folded it up. At length Mr. Ringgan spoke, breaking, as it were, the silence and his seriousness with the same effort.

"Well, dear!" said he cheerfully, "what does she say?"

"She says they are going to stay in Paris yet a good while longer."

"Hum!" said Mr. Ringgan. "Well, that ain't the wisest thing I should like to hear of her doing."

"Oh, but it's because Uncle Rossitur likes to stay there, I suppose, isn't it, grandpa?"

"I don't know, dear. Maybe **your** aunt's caught the French fever. She used to be a good sensible woman; but when people will go into a whirligig, I think some of their wits get blown away before they come out. Well, what else?"

"I am sure she is very kind," said Fleda. "She wants to have me go out there and live with her very much. She says I shall have everything I like and do just as I please. She says she will take as good care of me as ever I took of the kittens. And there's a long piece to you about it, that I'll give you to read as soon as we have a light. It is very good of her, isn't it, grandpa? I love Aunt Lucy very much."

"Well," said Mr. Ringgan after a pause, "how does she propose to get you there?"

"Why," said Fleda, "isn't it curious? she says there is a Mrs. Carleton here who is a friend of hers, and she is going to Paris in a little while, and Aunt Lucy asked her if she

wouldn't bring me, if you would let me go, and she said she would with great pleasure, and Aunt Lucy wants me to come out with her."

"Carleton! Hum!" said Mr. Ringgan; "that must be this young man's mother?"

"Yes, Aunt Lucy says she is here with her son, at least, she says they were coming."

"A very gentlemanly young man indeed," said Mr. Ringgan.

There was a grave silence. The old gentleman sat looking on the floor; Fleda sat looking into the fire with all her might.

"Well," said Mr. Ringgan after a little, "how would you like it, Fleda?"

"What, grandpa?"

"To go out to Paris with your aunt, with this Mrs. Carleton?"

"I shouldn't like it at all," said Fleda smiling, and letting her eyes go back to the fire. But looking after the pause of a minute or two again to her grandfather's face, she was struck with its expression of stern anxiety. She rose instantly, and coming to him and laying one hand gently on his knee, said in tones that fell as light on the ear as the touch of a moonbeam on the water, "*You* do not want me to go, do you, grandpa?"

"No, dear," said the old gentleman, letting his hand fall upon hers, "no, dear! that is the last thing I want!"

But Fleda's keen ear discerned not only the deep affection but something of *regret* in the voice, which troubled her. She stood, anxious and fearing, while her grandfather, lifting his hand again and again, let it fall gently upon hers; and amid all the fondness of the action Fleda somehow seemed to feel in it the same regret.

"You'll not let Aunt Lucy, nor anybody else, take me away from you, will you, grandpa?" said she after a little, leaning both arms affectionately on his knee and looking up into his face.

"No, indeed, dear!" said he, with an attempt at his usual heartiness. "Not as long as I have a place to keep you. While I have a roof to put my head under, it shall cover yours."

To Fleda's hope that would have said enough; but her grandfather's face was so moved from its wonted expression of calm dignity that it was plain *his* hope was tasting bitter things. Fleda watched in silent grief and amazement the watering eye and unnerved lip; till her grandfather indignantly dashing away a tear or two drew her close to his breast and kissed her. But she well guessed that the reason why he

did not for a minute or two say anything, was because he could not. Neither could she. She was fighting with her woman's nature to keep it down, learning the lesson early!

"Ah well," said Mr. Ringgan at length, in a kind of tone that might indicate the giving up a struggle which he had no means of carrying on, or the endeavour to conceal it from the too keen-wrought feelings of his little granddaughter, "there will be a way opened for us somehow. We must let our Heavenly Father take care of us."

"And He will, grandpa," whispered Fleda.

"Yes, dear! We are selfish creatures. Your father's and your mother's child will not be forgotten."

"Nor you, either, dear grandpa," said the little girl, laying her soft cheek alongside of his, and speaking by dint of a great effort.

He very much regretted that he had said too much. He did not, however, know exactly how to mend it. He kissed her and stroked her soft hair, but that and the manner of it only made it more difficult for Fleda to recover herself, which she was struggling to do; and when he tried to speak in accents of cheering his voice trembled. Fleda's heart was breaking, but she felt that she was making matters worse, and she had already concluded on a mature review of circumstances that it was her duty to be cheerful. So after a few very heartfelt tears which she could not help, she raised her head and smiled, even while she wiped the traces of them away.

"After all, grandpa," said she, "perhaps Mr. Jolly will come here in the morning with some good news and then we should be troubling ourselves just for nothing."

"Perhaps he will," said Mr. Ringgan, in a way that sounded much more like "perhaps he won't!" But Fleda was determined now not to *seem* discouraged again. She thought the best way was to change the conversation.

"Grandpa, was my father like my Uncle Rossitur in anything?"

The diversion was effected.

"Not he, dear!" said Mr. Ringgan. "Your father had ten times the man in him that ever your uncle was."

"Why what kind of man is Uncle Rossitur, grandpa?"

"O dear! I can't tell. I ha'n't seen much of him. I wouldn't judge a man without knowing more of him than I do of Mr. Rossitur. He seemed an amiable kind of man. But no one would ever have thought of looking at him, no more than at a shadow, when your father was by."

The diversion took effect on Fleda herself now. She looked up pleased.

"You remember your father, Fleda?"

"Yes, grandpa, but not very well always; I remember a great many things about him, but I can't remember exactly how he looked, except once or twice."

"Ay, and he wa'n't well the last time you remember him. But he was a noble-looking man—in form and face too—and his looks were the worst part of him. He seemed made of different stuff from all the people around," said Mr. Ringgan sighing, "and they felt it too I used to notice, without knowing it. When his cousins were 'Sam' and 'Johnny' and 'Bill,' he was always, that is, after he grew up, '*Mr. Walter.*' I believe they were a little afeard of him. And with all his bravery and fire he could be as gentle as a woman."

"I know that," said Fleda, whose eyes were dropping soft tears and glittering at the same time with gratified feeling. "What made him be a soldier, grandpa?"

"Oh, I don't know, dear! he was too good to make a farmer of, or his high spirit wanted to rise in the world, he couldn't rest without trying to be something more than other folks."

"Did *he* go to West Point, grandpa?"

"No, dear! he started without having so much of a push as that; but he was one of those that don't need any pushing; he would have worked his way up, put him anywhere you would, and he did—over the heads of West Pointers and all, and would have gone to the top, I verily believe, if he had lived long enough. He was as fine a fellow as there was in all the army. *I* don't believe there's the like of him left in it."

"He had been a major a good while, hadn't he, grandpa?"

"Yes. It was just after he was made captain that he went to Albany, and there he saw your mother. She and her sister, your Aunt Lucy, were wards of the patroon. I was in Albany, in the legislature, that winter, and I knew them both very well; but your Aunt Lucy had been married some years before. She was staying there that winter without her husband—he was abroad somewhere."

Fleda was no stranger to these details and had learned long ago what was meant by "wards" and "the patroon."

"Your father was made a major some years afterwards," Mr. Ringgan went on, "for his fine behaviour out here at the West—what's the name of the place?—I forget it just now—fighting the Indians. There never was anything finer done."

"He was brave, wasn't he, grandpa?"

"Brave!—he had a heart of iron sometimes, for as soft as it was at others. And he had an eye, when he was roused, that I never saw anything that would stand against. But your father had a better sort of courage than the common sort—he had enough of *that*—but this is a rarer thing—he never was afraid to do what in his conscience he thought was right. Moral courage I call it, and it is one of the very noblest qualities a man can have."

"That's a kind of courage a woman may have," said Fleda.

"Yes—you may have that; and I guess it's the only kind of courage *you*'ll ever be troubled with," said her grandfather looking laughingly at her. "However, any man may walk up to the cannon's mouth, but it is only one here and there that will walk out against men's opinions because he thinks it is right. That was one of the things I admired most in your father."

"Didn't my mother have it, too?" said Fleda.

"I don't know—she had about everything that was good. A sweet, pretty creature she was, as ever I saw."

"Was she like Aunt Lucy?"

"No, not much. She was a deal handsomer than your aunt is. She was the handsomest woman, I think, that ever I set eyes upon; and a sweet, gentle, lovely creature. *You*'ll never match her," said Mr. Ringgan, with a curious twist of his head and sly laughing twist of his eyes at Fleda; "you may be as *good* as she was, but you'll never be as good-looking."

Fleda laughed, nowise displeased.

"You've got her hazel eyes, though," remarked Mr. Ringgan after a minute or two, viewing his little granddaughter with a sufficiently satisfied expression of countenance.

"Grandpa," said she, "don't you think Mr. Carleton has handsome eyes?"

"Mr. Carleton?—hum—I don't know; I didn't look at his eyes. A very well-looking young man though—very gentlemanly too."

Fleda had heard all this and much more about her parents some dozens of times before; but she and her grandfather were never tired of going it over. If the conversation that recalled his lost treasures had of necessity a character of sadness and tenderness, it yet bespoke not more regret that he had lost them than exulting pride and delight in what they had been,—perhaps not so much. And Fleda delighted to go back and feed her imagination with stories of the mother whom she could not remember, and of the father whose fair bright

image stood in her memory as the embodiment of all that is high and noble and pure. A kind of guardian angel that image was to little Fleda. These ideal likennesses of her father and mother, the one drawn from history and recollection, the other from history only, had been her preservative from all the untoward influences and unfortunate examples which had surrounded her since her father's death some three or four years before had left her almost alone in her grandfather's house. They had created in her mind a standard of the true and beautiful in character, which nothing she saw around her, after of course her grandfather, and one other exception, seemed at all to meet; and partly from her own innate fineness of nature, and partly from this pure ideal always present with her, she had shrunk almost instinctively from the few varieties of human nature the country-side presented to her, and was in fact a very isolated little being, living in a world of her own, and clinging with all her strong out-goings of affection to her grandfather only; granting to but one other person any considerable share in her regard or esteem.

"It must be pleasant," said Fleda, after looking for some minutes thoughtfully into the fire,—"it must be a pleasant thing to have a father and mother."

"Yes, dear!" said her grandfather, sighing,—"you have lost a great deal! But there is your Aunt Lucy—you are not dependent altogether on me."

"Oh, grandpa!" said the little girl, laying one hand again pleadingly on his knee; "I didn't mean—I mean—I was speaking in general—I wasn't thinking of myself in particular."

"I know, dear!" said he, as before taking the little hand in his own and moving it softly up and down on his knee. But the action was sad, and there was the same look of sorrowful stern anxiety. Fleda got up and put her arm over his shoulder, speaking from a heart filled too full.

"I don't want Aunt Lucy—I don't care about Aunt Lucy; I don't want anything but you, grandpa. I wish you wouldn't talk so."

"Ah well, dear," said he, without looking at her,—he couldn't bear to look at her,—"it's well it is so. I shan't last a great while—it isn't likely—and I am glad to know there is someone you can fall back upon when I am gone."

Fleda's next words were scarce audible, but they contained a reproach to him for speaking so.

"We may as well look at it, dear," said he gravely; "it must come to that—sooner or later—but you mustn't distress

yourself about it beforehand. Don't cry—don't dear ! " said he, tenderly kissing her. " I didn't mean to trouble you so. There—there—look up, dear—let's take the good we have and be thankful for it. God will arrange the rest, in His own good way. Fleda ! I wouldn't have said a word if I had thought it would have worried you so."

He would not indeed. But he had spoken as men so often speak, out of the depths of their own passion or bitterness, forgetting that they are wringing the chords of a delicate harp, and not knowing what mischief they have done till they find the instrument all out of tune,—more often not knowing it ever. It is pity,—for how frequently a discord is left that jars all life long ; and how much more frequently still the harp, though retaining its sweetness and truth of tone to the end, is gradually unstrung.

Poor Fleda could hardly hold up her head for a long time, and recalling bitterly her unlucky innocent remark which had led to all this trouble she almost made up her mind with a certain heroine of Miss Edgeworth's, that " it is best never to mention things." Mr. Ringgan, now thoroughly alive to the wounds he had been inflicting, held his little pet in his arms, pillowed her head on his breast, and by every tender and soothing action and word endeavoured to undo what he had done. And after a while the agony was over, the wet eyelashes were lifted up, and the meek sorrowful little face lay quietly upon Mr. Ringgan's breast, gazing out into the fire as gravely as if the panorama of life were there. She little heeded at first her grandfather's cheering talk, she knew it was for a purpose.

" Ain't it most time for you to go to bed ? " whispered Mr. Ringgan, when he thought the purpose was effected.

" Shall I tell Cynthy to get you your milk, grandpa ? " said the little girl, rousing herself.

" Yes, dear. Stop—what if you and me was to have some roast apples ? Wouldn't you like it ? "

" Well—yes, I should, grandpa," said Fleda, understanding perfectly why he wished it, and wishing it herself for that same reason, and no other.

" Cynthy, let's have some of those roast apples," said Mr. Ringgan, " and a couple of bowls of milk here."

" No ; I'll get the apples myself, Cynthy," said Fleda.

" And you needn't take any of the cream off, Cynthy," added Mr. Ringgan.

One corner of the kitchen table was hauled up to the fire, to be comfortable, Fleda said, and she and her grandfather

sat down on the opposite sides of it to do honour to the apples and milk; each with the simple intent of keeping up appearances and cheating the other into cheerfulness. There is however—deny it who can—an exhilarating effect in good, wholesome food taken when one is in some need of it; and Fleda at last found the supper relish exceeding well. Everyone furthermore knows the relish of a hearty flow of tears when a secret weight has been pressing on the mind. She was just ready for anything reviving. After the third mouthful she began to talk, and before the bottom of the bowls were reached she had smiled more than once. So her grandfather thought no harm was done, and went to bed quite comforted; and Fleda climbed the steep stairs that led from his door to her little chamber just over his head. It was small and mean, immediately under the roof, with only one window. There were plenty of better rooms in the house, but Fleda liked this because it kept her near her grandfather; and indeed she had always had it ever since her father's death, and never thought of taking any other.

CHAPTER III.

I know each lane, and every alley green,
Dingle or bushy dell of this wide wood,
And every bosky bourn from side to side
My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood.—*Milton.*

FLEDA and her grandfather had but just risen from a tolerably early breakfast the next morning, when the two young sportsmen entered the room.

"Ha!" said Mr. Ringgan, "I declare! you're stirring betimes. Come five or six miles this morning a'ready. Well,—that's the stuff to make sportsmen of. Off for the woodcock, hey? And I was to go with you and shew you the ground. I declare I don't know how I can do it this morning, I'm so very stiff—ten times as bad as I was yesterday. I had a

window open in my room last night, I expect that must have been the cause. I don't see how I could have overlooked it, but I never gave it a thought, till this morning I found myself so lame I could hardly get out of bed. I am very sorry, upon my word!"

"I am very sorry we must lose your company, sir," said the young Englishman, "and for such a cause; but as to the rest, I daresay your directions will guide us sufficiently."

"I don't know about that," said the old gentleman. "It is pretty hard to steer by a chart that is only laid down in the imagination. Well, let us see—if I tell you how it is so easy to mistake one hill for another—Fleda, child, you put on your sun-bonnet and take these gentlemen back to the twenty-acre lot, and from there you can tell 'em how to go so I guess they won't mistake it."

"By no means!" said Mr. Carleton; "we cannot give her so much trouble; it would be buying our pleasure at much too dear a rate."

"Tut, tut," said the old gentleman; "she thinks nothing of trouble, and the walk'll do her good. She'd like to be out all day, I believe, if she had anyone to go along with, but I'm rather a stupid companion for such a spry little pair of feet."

Fleda went, but neither her step nor her look showed any great willingness to the business.

"I am sure, Mr. Ringgan," said Mr. Carleton, "your little granddaughter has some reason for not wishing to take such a long walk this morning. Pray allow us to go without her."

"Pho, pho," said the old gentleman, "she wants to go."

"I guess she's skeered o' the guns," said Cynthy, happy to get a chance to edge in a word before such company; "it's that ails her."

"Well, well, she must get used to it," said Mr. Ringgan. "Here she is!"

Fleda had it in her mind to whisper to him a word of hope about Mr. Jolly; but she recollected that it was at best an uncertain hope, and that if her grandfather's thoughts were off the subject, it was better to leave them so. She only kissed him for good-bye and went out with the two gentlemen.

As they took up their guns Mr. Carleton caught the timid shunning glance her eye gave at them.

"Do you dislike the company of these noisy friends of ours, Miss Fleda?" said he.

Fleda hesitated, and finally said "she didn't much like to be very near them when they were fired."

"Put that fear away then," said he, "for they shall keep a respectful silence as long as they have the honour to be in your company. If the woodcock come about us as tame as quails, our guns shall not be provoked to say anything till your departure gives them leave."

Fleda smiled her thanks and set forward, privately much confirmed in her opinion that Mr. Carleton had handsome eyes.

At a little distance from the house Fleda left the meadow for an old apple orchard at the left, lying on a steep side hill. Up this hillside they toiled; and then found themselves on a ridge of table-land, stretching back for some distance along the edge of a little valley or bottom of perfectly flat smooth pasture ground. The valley was very narrow, only divided into fields by fences running from side to side. The table-land might be a hundred feet or more above the level of the bottom, with a steep face towards it. A little way back from the edge the woods began; between them and the brow of the hill the ground was smooth and green, planted as if by art with flourishing young silver pines and once in a while a hemlock, some standing in all their luxuriance alone, and some in groups. With now and then a smooth grey rock, or large boulder-stone which had somehow inexplicably stopped on the brow of the hill instead of rolling down into what at some former time no doubt was a bed of water; all this open strip of the table-land might have stood with very little coaxing for a piece of a gentleman's pleasure ground.

When they were about over against the middle of the valley, Mr. Carleton suddenly made a pause and stood for some minutes silently looking. His two companions came to a halt on either side of him, one not a little pleased, the other a little impatient.

"Beautiful!" Mr. Carleton said at length.

"Yes," said Fleda gravely, "I think it's a pretty place. I like it up here."

"We shan't catch many woodcock among these pines," said young Rossitur.

"What are those trees so beautifully tinged with red and orange, down there by the fence in the meadow?"

"I am not woodsman enough to inform you," replied Rossitur.

"Those are maples," said Fleda, "sugar maples. The one all orange is a hickory."

"How do you know?" said Mr. Carleton, turning to her. "By your wit as a fairy?"

"I know by the colour," said Fleda modestly, "and by the shape too."

"Fairy," said Mr. Rossitur, "if you have any of the stuff about you, I wish you would knock this gentleman over the head with your wand, and put the spirit of moving into him. He is going to dream here all day."

"Not at all," said his friend, springing up; "I am ready for you; "but I want other game than woodcock just now, I confess."

They walked along in silence, and had near reached the extremity of the tableland, which towards the end of the valley descended into ground of a lower level covered with woods, when Mr. Carleton, who was a little ahead, was startled by Fleda's voice exclaiming, in a tone of distress, "Oh, not the robins!" and turning about perceived Mr. Rossitur standing still with levelled gun, and just in the act to shoot. Fleda had stopped her ears. In the same instant Mr. Carleton had thrown up the gun, demanding of Rossitur, with a singular change of expression, "what he meant."

"Mean?" said the young gentleman, meeting with an astonished face the indignant fire of his companion's eyes; "why, I mean not to meddle with other people's guns, Mr. Carleton. What do *you* mean?"

"Nothing but to protect myself."

"Protect yourself?" said Rossitur, heating as the other cooled; "from what, in the name of wonder?"

"Only from having my word blown away by your fire," said Carleton smiling. "Come, Rossitur, recollect yourself—remember our compact."

"Compact! I made none."

Mr. Carleton turned from him very coolly and walked on.

They left the tableland and the wood, entered the valley again, and passed through a large orchard, the last of the succession of fields which stretched along it. Beyond this orchard the ground rose suddenly, and on the steep hill-side there had been a large plantation of Indian corn. The corn was harvested, but the ground was still covered with numberless little stacks of the cornstalks. Half way up the hill stood three ancient chestnut trees; veritable patriarchs of the nut tribe they were, and respected and esteemed as patriarchs should be.

"There are no 'dropping-nuts' to-day, either," said Fleda, to whom the sight of her forest friends in the distance probably suggested the thought, for she had not spoken for some time. "I suppose there hasn't been frost enough yet."

"Why, you have a good memory, Fairy," said Mr. Carleton. "Do you give the nuts leave to fall of themselves?"

"Oh, sometimes grandpa and I go a-nutting," said the little girl getting lightly over the fence, "but we haven't been this year."

"Then it is a pleasure to come yet."

"No," said Fleda quietly, "the trees near the house have been stripped; and the only other nice place there is for us to go to, Mr. Didenhover let the Shakers have the nuts. I shan't get any this year."

"Don't you know of any other trees that are out of this Mr. Didenhover's way?"

"Yes," said Fleda, "I know a place where there used to be beautiful hickory trees, and some chestnuts too, I think; but it is too far off for grandpa, and I couldn't go there alone. This is the twenty-acre lot," said she, looking, though she did not say it, "here I leave you."

"I am glad to hear it," said her cousin. "Now give us our directions, Fleda, and thank you for your services."

"Stop a minute," said Mr. Carleton. "What if you and I should try to find those same hickory trees, Miss Fleda? Will you take me with you? or is it too long a walk?"

"For me? Oh, no!" said Fleda, with a face of awakening hope; "but," she added timidly, "you were going a shooting, sir?"

"What on earth are you thinking of, Carleton?" said young Rossitur. "Let the nuts and Fleda alone, do!"

"By your leave, Mr. Rossitur," said Carleton. "My murderous intents have all left me, Miss Fleda. I suppose your wand has been playing about me—and I should like nothing better than to go with you over the hills this morning I have been a-nutting many a time in my own woods at home, and I want to try it for once in the New World. Will you take me?"

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Fleda, "but we have passed the turning a long way—we must go back ever so far the same way we came to get to the place where we turn off to go up the mountain."

"I don't wish for a prettier way, if it isn't so far as to tire you, Fairy?"

"Oh, it won't tire me!" said Fleda, overjoyed.

"Carleton!" exclaimed young Rossitur. "Can you be so absurd! Lose this splendid day for the woodcock when we may not have another while we are here!"

"You are not a true sportsman, Mr. Rossitur," said the other coolly, "or you would know what it is to have some sympathy with the sports of others. But *you* will have the day for the woodcock, and bring us home a great many, I hope. Miss Fleda, suppose we give this impatient young gentleman his orders and despatch him."

"I thought you were more of a sportsman," said the vexed West Pointer, "or your sympathy would be with me."

"I tell you, the sporting mania was never stronger on me," said the other carelessly. "Something less than a rifle, however, will do to bring down the game I am after. We will rendezvous at the little village over yonder, unless I go home before you, which I think is more probable. Au revoir!"

With careless gracefulness he saluted his disconcerted companion, who moved off with ungraceful displeasure. Fleda and Mr. Carleton then began to follow back the road they had come, in the highest good humour both. Her sparkling face told him with even greater emphasis than her words—

"I am so much obliged to you, sir."

Fleda was tramping over the ground at a furious rate.

"How many nuts do you count upon securing to-day?" said Mr. Carleton gravely.

"I don't know," said Fleda, with a business face. "There are a good many trees, and fine large ones, and I don't believe anybody has found them out—they are so far out of the way; there ought to be a good parcel of nuts."

"But," said Mr. Carleton with perfect gravity, "if we should be lucky enough to find a supply for your winter's store, it would be too much for you and me to bring home, Miss Fleda, unless you have a broomstick in the service of fairydom."

"A broomstick?" said Fleda.

"Yes, did you never hear of the man who had a broomstick that would fetch pails of water at his bidding?"

"No," said Fleda, laughing. "What a convenient broomstick! I wish we had one. But I know what I can do, Mr. Carleton; if there should be too many nuts for us to bring home I can take Cynthy afterwards and get the rest of them."

"Well," said Mr. Carleton, smiling curiously to himself, "in that case I shall be even of more use than I had hoped. But shan't we want a basket, Miss Fleda?"

"Yes, indeed," said Fleda, "a good large one; I am going to run down to the house for it, if you'll be so good as to wait for me, sir, I won't be long."

"No," said he; "I will walk with you and leave my gun in safe quarters. You had better not travel so fast, or I am afraid you will never reach the hickory trees."

Fleda smiled and said there was no danger, but she slackened her pace, and they proceeded at a more reasonable rate till they reached the house.

Mr. Carleton would not go in, placing his gun in an outer shelter. Fleda dashed into the kitchen, and after a few minutes' delay came out again with a huge basket, which Mr. Carleton took from her without suffering his inward amusement to reach his face, and a little tin pail which she kept under her own guardianship. In vain Mr. Carleton offered to take it with the basket or even to put it in the basket, where he showed her it would go very well; it must go nowhere but in Fleda's own hand.

Fleda was in restless haste till they had reached a height of the mountain that cleared them a view, and over the tops of the trees they looked abroad to a very wide extent of country undulating with hill and vale, hill and valley alike far below at their feet. Fair and rich, the gently swelling hills one beyond another, in the patchwork dress of their many-coloured fields, the gay hues of the woodland softened and melted into a rich autumn glow, and far away, beyond even where this glow was sobered and lost in the distance, the faint blue line of the Catskill; faint, but clear and distinct through the transparent air. Such a sky! of such etherialized purity as if made for spirits to travel in and tempting them to rise and free themselves from the soil; and the stillness, like Nature's hand laid upon the soul; bidding it think. In view of all that vastness and grandeur, man's littleness does bespeak itself. A very extended landscape, however genial, is also sober in its effect on the mind. One seems to emerge from the narrowness of individual existence, and take a larger view of Life as well as of Creation.

Perhaps Mr. Carleton felt it so, for after his first expression of pleasure he stood silently and gravely looking for a long time. Little Fleda's eye loved it too, but she looked her fill and then sat down on a stone to await her companion's pleasure, glancing now and then up at his face, which gave her no encouragement to interrupt him. It was gravely and even gloomily thoughtful. He stood so long without stirring that poor Fleda began to have sad thoughts of the possibility of gathering all the nuts from the hickory trees, and she heaved a very gentle sigh once or twice; but the dark blue eye which

she with reason admired remained fixed on the broad scene below, as if it were reading or trying to read there a difficult lesson. And when at last he turned and began to go up the path again he kept the same face, and went moodily swinging his arm up and down, as if in disturbed thought. Fleda was too happy to be moving to care for her companion's silence; she would have compounded for no more conversation so they might but reach the nut trees.

In a hollow, rather a deep hollow, behind the crest of the hill, as Fleda had said, they came at last to a noble group of large hickory trees, with one or two chestnuts standing in attendance on the outskirts. And also as Fleda had said, or hoped, the place was so far from convenient access that nobody had visited them; they were thick hung with fruit. If the spirit of the game had been wanting or failing in Mr. Carleton, it must have roused again into full life at the joyous heartiness of Fleda's exclamations. At any rate, no boy could have taken to the business better. He cut, with her permission, a stout long pole in the woods; and swinging himself lightly into one of the trees showed that he was a master in the art of whipping them. Fleda was delighted but not surprised; for from the first moment of Mr. Carleton's proposing to go with her she had been privately sure that he would not prove an inactive or inefficient ally. By whatever slight tokens she might read this, in whatsoever fine characters of the eye, or speech, or manner, she knew it; and knew it just as well before they reached the hickory trees as she did afterwards.

When one of the trees was well stripped, the young gentleman mounted into another, while Fleda set herself to hull and gather up the nuts under the one first beaten. She could make but little headway, however, compared with her companion; the nuts fell a great deal faster than she could put them in her basket. The trees were heavy laden and Mr. Carleton seemed determined to have the whole crop; from the second tree he went to the third. Fleda was bewildered with her happiness; this was doing business in style. She went on hulling and gathering with all possible industry.

After the third tree was finished, Mr. Carleton threw down his pole, and resting himself upon the ground at the foot told Fleda he would wait a few moments before he began again.

"Don't you go to school?"

"Oh, no," said Fleda, smiling.

"Then your grandfather teaches you at home?"

"No," said Fleda, "father used to teach me; grandpa doesn't teach me much."

"What do you do with yourself all day long?"

"Oh, plenty of things," said Fleda, smiling again. "I read and talk to grandpa, and go riding, and do a great many things."

"Has your home always been here, Fairy?" said Mr. Carleton, after a few minutes' pause.

Fleda said "No, sir," and there stopped; and then seeming to think that politeness called upon her to say more, she added:

"I have lived with grandpa ever since father left me here when he was going away among the Indians,—I used to be always with him before."

"And how long ago is that?"

"It is—four years, sir; more, I believe. He was sick when he came back, and we never went away from Queechy again."

Mr. Carleton looked again silently at the child, who had given him these pieces of information with a singular grave propriety of manner, and even as it were reluctantly.

"I think, Miss Fleda," said Mr. Carleton a minute after, "you had better let me take you with my mother over the sea, when we go back again,—to Paris."

"Why, sir?"

"You know," said he, half smiling, "your aunt wants you, and has engaged my mother to bring you with her if she can."

"I know it," said Fleda. "But I am not going."

It was spoken not rudely, but in a tone of quiet determination.

"Aren't you too tired, sir?" said she gently, when she saw Mr. Carleton preparing to launch into the remaining hickory trees.

"Not I!" said he. "I am not tired till I have done, Fairy."

They set both to work again with renewed energy, and rested not till the treasures of the trees had been all brought to the ground, and as large a portion of them as could be coaxed and shaken into Fleda's basket had been cleared from the hulls and bestowed there. But there remained a vast quantity. These, with a good deal of labour, Mr. Carleton and Fleda gathered into a large heap in rather a sheltered place by the side of a rock, and took what measures they might to conceal them. This was entirely at Fleda's instance.

"You and your maid Cynthia will have to make a good

many journeys, Miss Fleda, to get all these home, unless you can muster a larger basket."

"Oh, *that's* nothing," said Fleda. "It will be all fun. I don't care how many times we have to come. You are *very* good, Mr. Carleton."

"Do you think so?" said he. "I wish I did. I wish you would make your wand rest on me, Fairy."

"My wand?" said Fleda.

"Yes—you know your grandfather says you are a fairy, and carry a wand. What does he say that for, Miss Fleda?"

Fleda said she supposed it was because he loved her so much; but the rosy smile with which she said it would have let her hearer, if he had needed enlightening, far more into the secret than she was herself. And if the simplicity in her face had not been equal to the wit, Mr. Carleton would never have ventured the look of admiration he bestowed on her. He knew it was safe. *Approbation* she saw, and it made her smile the rosier; but the admiration was a step beyond her; Fleda could make nothing of it.

They descended the mountain now with a hasty step, for the day was wearing well on. When they reached the last fence, but a little way from the house, Fleda made a resolute pause.

"Mr. Carleton," said she.

Mr. Carleton put down his basket, and looked in some surprise at the hesitating anxious little face that looked up at him.

"Won't you please not say anything to grandpa about my going away?"

"Why not, Fairy?" said he kindly.

"Because I don't think I ought to go."

"But may it not be possible," said he, "that your grandfather can judge better in the matter than you can do."

"No," said Fleda, "I don't think he can. He would do anything he thought would be most for my happiness; but it wouldn't be for my happiness," she said, with an unsteady lip; "I don't know what he would do if I went!"

"You think he would have no sunshine if your wand didn't touch him?" said Mr. Carleton, smiling.

"No, sir," said Fleda gravely, "I don't think that; but won't you, please, Mr. Carleton, not to speak about it?"

"But are you sure," he said, sitting down on a stone hard by and taking one of her hands—"are you sure that you would not like to go with us? I wish you would change your mind about it. My mother will love you very much, and I will

take the especial charge of you till we give you to your aunt in Paris. If the wind blows a little too rough, I will always put myself between it and you," he added, smiling.

Fleda smiled faintly, but immediately begged Mr. Carleton, "not to say anything to put into her grandfather's head."

"It must be there already, I think, Miss Fleda; but at any rate you know my mother must perform her promise to your aunt, Mrs. Rossitur; and she would not do that without letting your grandfather know how glad she would be to take you."

Fleda stood silent a moment, and then, with a touching look of waiting patience in her sweet face, suffered Mr. Carleton to help her over the fence; and they went home.

To Fleda's unspeakable surprise it was found to be past four o'clock, and Cynthy had supper ready. Mr. Ringgan with great cordiality invited Mr. Carleton to stay with them, but he could not; his mother would expect him to dinner.

"Where is your mother?"

"At Montepoole, sir. We have been to Niagara, and came this way on our return; partly that my mother might fulfil the promise she made Mrs. Rossitur—to let you know, sir, with how much pleasure she will take charge of your little granddaughter and convey her to her friends in Paris, if you can think it best to let her go."

"Hum!—she is very kind," said Mr. Ringgan, with a look of grave and not unmoved consideration which Fleda did not in the least like. "How long will you stay at Montepoole, sir?"

It might be several days, Mr. Carleton said.

"Hum!—You have given up this day to Fleda, Mr. Carleton; suppose you take to-morrow for the game, and come here and try our country fare when you have got through shooting—you and young Mr. Rossitur? and I'll think over this question and let you know about it."

Fleda was delighted to see that her friend accepted this invitation with apparent pleasure.

"You will be kind enough to give my respects to your mother," Mr. Ringgan went on, "and thanks for her kind offer. I may perhaps—I don't know—avail myself of it. If anything should bring Mrs. Carleton this way, we should like to see her. I am glad to see my friends," he said, shaking the young gentleman's hand, "as long as I have a house to ask 'em to!"

"That will be for many years, I trust," said Mr. Carleton respectfully, struck with something in the old gentleman's manner.

"I don't know, sir," said Mr. Ringgan, with again the dignified look of trouble; "it may not be. I wish you good-day, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

A mind that in a calm angelic mood
Of happy wisdom, meditating good,
Beholds, of all from her high power required,
Much done, and much designed, and more desired.
—*Wordsworth.*

"I've had such a delicious day, dear grandpa," said little Fleda, as they sat at supper; "you can't think how kind Mr. Carleton has been."

"Has he? Well, dear—I'm glad on't he seems a very nice young man."

Almost Fleda's first thought on coming home had been about Mr. Jolly. But she knew very well, without asking, that he had not been there; she would not touch the subject.

"I haven't had such a fine day of nutting in a great while, grandpa," she said again; "and you never saw such a good hand as Mr. Carleton is at whipping the trees."

"How came he to go with you?"

"I don't know; I suppose it was to please me, in the first place; but I am sure he enjoyed it himself; and he liked the pie and cheese, too, Cynthy."

"Where did your cousin go?"

"Oh, he went off after the woodcock. I hope he didn't find any."

"What do you think of those two young men, Fairy?"

"In what way, grandpa?"

"I mean, which of them do you like the best?"

"Mr. Carleton."

"But t'other one's your cousin," said Mr. Ringgan, bending

forward and examining his little granddaughter's face with a curious pleased look, as he often did when expecting an answer from her.

"Yes," said Fleda, "but he isn't so much of a gentleman."

"How do you know that?"

"I don't think he is," said Fleda quietly.

"But why, Fairy?"

"He doesn't know how to keep his word as well, grandpa."

"Ay, ay? let's hear about that," said Mr. Ringgan.

A little reluctantly, for Cynthia was present, Fleda told the story of the robins, and how Mr. Carleton would not let the gun be fired.

"Wa'n't your cousin a little put out by that?"

"They were both put out," said Fleda; "Mr. Carleton was very angry for a minute; and then Mr. Rossitur was angry, but I think he could have been angrier if he had chosen."

Mr. Ringgan laughed, and then seemed in a sort of amused triumph about something. "Well, dear!" he remarked after a while, "you'll never buy wooden nutmegs, I expect."

Fleda laughed and hoped not, and asked him why he said so. But he didn't tell her.

"Mr. Ringgan," said Cynthy, "hadn't I better run up the hill after supper, and ask Mis' Plumfield to come down and help to-morrow? I s'pose you'll want considerable of a set-out; and if both them young men comes you'll want some more help to entertain 'em than I can give you, it's likely."

"Do so, do so," said the old gentleman. "Tell her who I expect, and ask her if she can come and help you, and me too."

"Oh, and I'll go with you, Cynthy," said Fleda. "I'll get Aunt Miriam to come, I know."

"I should think you'd be run off your legs already, Fleda," said Miss Cynthia; "what ails you to want to be going again."

But this remonstrance availed nothing. Supper was hurried through, and leaving the table standing Cynthia and Fleda set off to "run up the hill." They were hardly a few steps from the gate when they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs behind them, and the two young gentlemen came riding hurriedly past, having joined company and taken their horses at Queechy Run. Rossitur did not seem to see his little cousin and her companion; but the doffed cap and low inclination of the other rider as they flew by called up a smile and blush of pleasure to Fleda's face.

A few hundred yards from Mr. Ringgan's gate the road began

to wind up a very long heavy hill. Just at the hill's foot it crossed by a rude bridge the bed of a noisy brook that came roaring down from the higher grounds, turning sundry mill and factory wheels in its way. About half-way up the hill one of these was placed, belonging to a mill for sawing boards.

"That had ought to be your grandpa's mill this minute," observed Cynthy.

"I wish it was!" sighed Fleda. "Who's got it now, Cynthy?"

"Oh, it's that chap McGowan, I expect; he's got pretty much of the hull of everything. I told Mr. Ringgan I wouldn't let him have it if it was me, at the time. Your grandpa'd be glad to get it back now, I guess."

Fleda guessed so too; but also guessed that Miss Gall was probably very far from being possessed of the whole rationale of the matter. So she made her no answer.

After reaching the brow of the hill the road continued on a very gentle ascent towards a little settlement half a quarter of a mile off; passing now and then a few scattered cottages or an occasional mill or turner's shop. Several mills and factories, with a store and a very few dwelling-houses were all the settlement; not enough to entitle it to the name of a village. Beyond those and the mill-ponds, of which in the course of the road there were three or four, and with a brief intervening space of cultivated fields, a single farm-house stood alone; just upon the borders of a large and very fair sheet of water from which all the others had their supply. So large and fair that nobody cavilled at its taking the style of a lake and giving its own pretty name of Deepwater both to the settlement and the farm that half embraced it. This farm was Seth Plumfield's.

At the garden gate Fleda quitted Cynthy and rushed forward to meet her aunt, whom she saw coming round the corner of the house.

"Oh, Aunt Miriam," said Fleda eagerly, "we are going to have company to tea to-morrow—won't you come and help us?"

Aunt Miriam laid her hands upon Fleda's shoulders and looked at Cynthy.

"I came up to see if you wouldn't come down to-morrow, Mis' Plumfield," said that personage, with her usual dry business tone, always a little on the wrong side of sweet; "your brother has taken a notion to ask two young fellows from the Pool to supper, and they're grand folks, I s'pose, and

have got to have a fuss made of 'em. I don't know what Mr. Ringgan was thinkin' of, or whether he thinks I have got anything to do or not; but anyhow they're a comin', I s'pose, and must have somethin' to eat."

"Ah, do come, Aunt Miriam!" said Fleda; "it will be twice as pleasant if you do; and besides, we want to have everything very nice, you know."

Aunt Miriam smiled at Fleda, and inquired of Miss Gall what she had in the house.

"Why, I don't know, Mis' Plumfield," said the lady, while Fleda threw her arms round her aunt and thanked her—"there ain't nothin' particler—pork and beef and the old story. I've got some first-rate pickles."

"Any of those small hams left?"

"Not a bone of 'em—those six weeks. *I* don't see how they've gone, for my part. I'd lay any wager there were two in the smoke-house when I took the last one out. If Mr. Didenhover was a little more like a weasel I should think he'd been in."

"Have you cooked that roaster I sent down?"

"No, Mis' Plumfield, I ha'n't—it's such a plaguy sight of trouble!" said Cynthy with a little apologetic giggle; "I was keepin' it for some day when I hadn't much to do."

"I'll take the trouble of it. I'll be down bright and early in the morning, and we'll see what's best to do. But who is it that grandpa has asked?"

Fleda and Cynthy both opened at once.

"One of them is my cousin, Aunt Miriam, that was at West Point, and the other is the nicest English gentleman you ever saw—you will like him very much—he has been with me getting nuts all to-day."

"They're a smart enough couple of chaps," said Cynthia; "they look as if they lived where money was plenty."

"Well, I'll come to-morrow," repeated Mrs. Plumfield, "and we'll see about it. Good night, dear!"

She took Fleda's head in both her hands and gave her a most affectionate kiss; and the two petitioners set off homewards again.

Aunt Miriam was not at all like her brother in feature, though the moral characteristics suited the relationship sufficiently well. There was the expression of strong sense and great benevolence; the unbending uprightness of mind and body at once; the dignity of an essentially noble character, not the same as Mr. Ringgan's, but such as well

became his sister. She had been brought up among the Quakers, and though now and for many years a staunch Presbyterian, she still retained a tincture of the calm efficient gentleness of mind and manner that belongs so inexplicably to them. More womanly sweetness than was in Mr. Ringgan's blue eye a woman need not wish to have; and perhaps his sister's had not so much. There was no want of it in her heart, nor in her manner, but the many and singular excellencies of her character were a little overshadowed by super-excellent housekeeping. Not a taint of the littleness that sometimes grows therefrom,—not a trace of the narrowness of mind that over-attention to such pursuits is too apt to bring; on every important occasion Aunt Miriam would come out free and unshackled from all the cobweb entanglements of housewifery; she would have tossed housewifery to the winds if need were (but it never was, for in a new sense she always contrived to make both ends meet). It was only in the unbroken everyday course of affairs that Aunt Miriam's face shewed any tokens of that incessant train of *small cares* which had never left their impertinent footprints upon the broad, high brow of her brother.

CHAPTER V.

Ynne London citye was I borne,
Of parents of grete note;
My fadre dydd a nobile arms
Emblazon on hys cote.—*Chatterton.*

In the snuggest and best private room of the House at Montepoole a party of ladies and gentlemen were gathered, awaiting the return of the sportsmen.

It was rather an elderly party, with the exception of one young man whose age might match that of the absent two.

He was walking up and down the room with somewhat the air of having nothing to do with himself. Another gentleman, much older, stood warming his back at the fire, feeling about his jaws and chin with one hand and looking at the dinner-table in a sort of expectant reverie. The rest, three ladies, sat quietly chatting.

One of these ladies the mother of the perambulating young officer (he was a class-mate of Rossitur's), was extremely plain in feature, even more than *ordinary*. This plainness was not however devoid of sense, and it was relieved by an uncommon amount of good-nature and kindness of heart. In her son the sense deepened into acuteness, and the kindness of heart retreated, it is to be hoped, into some hidden recess of his nature; for it very rarely showed itself in open expression. That is, to an eye keen in reading the natural signs of emotion; for it cannot be said that his manner had any want of amenity or politeness.

The second lady, the wife of the gentleman on the hearth-rug, was a strong contrast to this mother and son; remarkably pretty, delicate and even lovely; with a black eye however that, though in general soft, could show a mischievous sparkle upon occasion; still young, and one of those women who always were and always will be pretty and delicate at any age.

The third had been very handsome, and was still a very elegant woman, but her face had seen more of the world's wear and tear. It had never known placidity of expression beyond what the habitual command of good-breeding imposed. She looked exactly what she was, a perfect woman of the world. A very good specimen, for Mrs. Carleton had sense and cultivation and even feeling enough to play the part very gracefully; yet her mind was bound in the shackles of "the world's" tyrannical forging and had never been free; and her heart bowed submissively to the same authority.

"Here they are! Welcome home," exclaimed this lady, as her son and his friend at length made their appearance. "Welcome home—we are all famishing; and I don't know why in the world we waited for you, for I am sure you don't deserve it. What success, Mr. Rossitur?"

"'Faith, ma'am, there's little enough to boast of, as far as I am concerned. Mr. Carleton may speak for himself."

"I am very sorry, ma'am, you waited for me," said that gentleman. "I am a delinquent, I acknowledge. The day came to an end before I was at all aware of it."

"It would not do to flatter you so far as to tell you why we

waited," said Mrs. Evelyn's soft voice. And then perceiving that the gentleman at whom she was looking gave her no answer she turned to the other. "How many woodcock, Mr. Rossitur?"

"Nothing to show, ma'am," he replied. "Didn't see a solitary one——"

"Did you find the right ground, Rossitur?"

"I had a confounded long tramp after it if I didn't," said the discomfited sportsman, who did not seem to have yet recovered his good humour.

"Were you not together?" said Mrs. Carleton. "Where were you, Guy?"

"Following the sport another way, ma'am; I had very good success too."

"What's the total?" said Mr. Evelyn. "How much game did you bag?"

"Really, sir, I didn't count. I can only answer for a bag full."

"Ladies and gentlemen!" cried Rossitur, bursting forth. "What will you say when I tell you that Mr. Carleton deserted me and the sport in a most unceremonious manner, and that he, the cynical philosopher, the reserved English gentleman, the gay man of the world, you are all of 'em by turns, aren't you, Carleton? *he!* has gone and made a very cavoreila servante of himself to a piece of rusticity, and spent all to-day in helping a little girl to pick up chestnuts!"

"Mr. Carleton would be a better man if he were to spend a good many more days in the same manner," said that gentleman, dryly enough. But the entrance of dinner put a stop to both laughter and questioning for a time, all of the party being well disposed to their meat.

When the pickerel from the lakes, and the poultry and half-kept joints had had their share of attention, and a pair of fine wild ducks were set on the table, the tongues of the party found something to do besides eating.

"We have had a very satisfactory day among the Shakers, Guy," said Mrs. Carleton; "and we have arranged to drive to Kenton to-morrow—I suppose you will go with us?"

"With pleasure, mother, but that I am engaged to dinner about five or six miles in the opposite direction."

"Engaged to dinner! what with this old gentleman where you went last night? And you too, Mr. Rossitur?"

"I have made no promise, ma'am, but I take it I must go."

"Vexatious! Is the little girl going with us, Guy?"

"I don't know yet—I half apprehend, yes; there seems to be a doubt in her grandfather's mind, not whether he can let her go, but whether he can keep her, and that looks like it."

"Is it your little cousin who proved the successful rival of the woodcock to-day, Carleton?" said Mrs. Evelyn. "What is she?"

"I don't know, ma'am, upon my word. I presume Carleton will tell you she is something uncommon."

"Is she, Mr. Carleton?"

"What, ma'am?"

"Uncommon?"

"Very."

"Come! That *is* something for *you*," said Rossitur's brother officer, Lieutenant Thorn.

"What's the uncommonness?" said Mrs. Thorn, addressing herself rather to Mr. Rossitur as she saw Mr. Carleton's averted eye. "Is she handsome, Mr. Rossitur?"

"I can't tell you, I am sure, ma'am. I saw nothing but a nice child enough in a calico frock, just such as one would see in any farm-house."

"Is she a pretty child, Guy?" said Mrs. Carleton, who did not relish her son's grave face.

"No, ma'am, something more than that."

"How old?"

"About ten or eleven."

"That's an ugly age."

"She will never be at an ugly age."

"What style of beauty?"

"The highest—that degree of mould and finish which belongs only to the finest material."

"That is hardly the kind of beauty one would expect to see in such a place," said Mrs. Carleton. "From one side of her family to be sure she has a right to it."

"I have seen very few examples of it anywhere," said her son.

"Who were her parents?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Her mother was Mrs. Rossitur's sister, her father——"

"Amy Charlton!" exclaimed Mrs. Evelyn. "Oh, I knew her! Was Amy Charlton her mother? Oh, I didn't know whom you were talking of. She was one of my dearest friends. Her daughter may well be handsome—she was one of the most lovely persons I ever knew; in body and mind both. Oh, I loved Amy Charlton very much. I must see this child."

"I don't know who her father was," Mrs. Carleton went on.

"Oh, her father was Major Ringgan," said Mrs. Evelyn. "I never saw him, but I have heard him spoken of in very high terms. I always heard that Amy married very well."

"Major Ringgan!" said Mrs. Thorn; "his name is very well known; he was very distinguished."

"He was a self-made man entirely," said Mrs. Evelyn, in a tone that conveyed a good deal more than the simple fact.

"Yes, he was a self-made man," said Mrs. Thorn, "but I should never think of that where a man distinguishes himself so much; he was very distinguished."

"Yes, and for more than officer-like qualities," said Mrs. Evelyn. "I have heard his personal accomplishments as a gentleman highly praised."

"So that little Miss Ringgan's right to be a beauty may be considered clearly made out," said Mr. Thorn.

"It is one of those singular cases," said Mrs. Carleton, "where purity of blood proves itself, and one has no need to go back to past generations to make any enquiry concerning it."

"Hear him!" cried Rossitur; "and for the life of me I could see nothing of all this wonder. Her face is not at all striking."

"The wonder is not so much in what it is as in what it indicates," said Mr. Carleton.

"What does it indicate?" said his mother.

"Suppose you were to ask me to count the shades of colour in a rainbow," answered he.

"Hear him!" cried Thorn again.

"Well, I hope she will go with us and we shall have a chance of seeing her," said Mrs. Carleton.

"If she were only a few years older it is my belief you would see enough of her, ma'am," said young Rossitur.

The haughty coldness of Mr. Carleton's look at this speech could not be surpassed.

"But she has beauty of feature too, has she not?" Mrs. Carleton asked again of her son.

"Yes, in a very high degree. The contour of the eye and brow I never saw finer."

"It is a little odd," said Mrs. Evelyn with the slightest touch of a piqued air (she had some daughters at home), "that is a kind of beauty one is apt to associate with high breeding, and certainly you very rarely see it anywhere else; and Major Ringgan, however distinguished and estimable,

as I have no doubt he was—— And this child must have been brought up with no advantages, here in the country."

"My dear madam," said Mr. Carleton, smiling a little, "this high breeding is a very fine thing, but it can neither be given nor bequeathed; and we cannot entail it."

"But it can be taught, can't it?"

"If it could be taught it is to be hoped it would be oftener learned," said the young man dryly.

"But what do we mean then, when we talk of the high-breeding of certain classes—and families? and why are we not disappointed when we look to find it in connection with certain names and positions in society?"

"I do not know," said Mr. Carleton.

"You don't mean to say, I suppose, Mr. Carleton," said Thorn, bridling a little, "that it is a thing independent of circumstances, and that there is no value in blood?"

"Very nearly—answering the question as you understand it."

"May I ask you how you understand it?"

"As you do, sir."

"I never heard you talk so before, Guy," said his mother, looking at him. His eyes had grown dark with intensity of expression while he was speaking, gazing at visionary flowers or beauties through the dinner-table mahogany. He looked up and laughed as she addressed him, and rising turned off lightly with his usual air.

"I congratulate you, Mrs. Carleton," Mrs. Evelyn whispered as they went from the table, "that this little beauty is not a few years older."

"Why?" said Mrs. Carleton. "If she is all that Guy says, I would give anything in the world to see him married."

"Time enough," said Mrs. Evelyn with a knowing smile.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Carleton. "I think he would be happier. He is a restless spirit—nothing satisfies him—nothing fixes him. He cannot rest at home—he abhors politics—he flits away from country to country and doesn't remain long anywhere."

"And you with him."

"And I with him. I should like to see if a wife could not persuade him to stay at home."

"I guess you have petted him too much," said Mrs. Evelyn slyly. "I cannot have petted him too much, for he has never disappointed me."

"No—of course not; but it seems you find it difficult to lead him."

"No one ever succeeded in doing that," said Mrs. Carleton, with a smile that was anything but an ungratified one. "He never wanted driving, and to lead him is impossible. You may try it, and while you think you are going to gain your end, if he thinks it worth while, you will suddenly find that he is leading you. It is so with everybody—in some inexplicable way."

Mrs. Evelyn thought the mystery was very easily explicable as far as the mother was concerned; and changed the conversation.

CHAPTER VI.

To them life was a simple art
Of duties to be done,
A game where each man took his part,
A race where all must run;
A battle whose great scheme and scope
They little cared to know,
Content, as men-at-arms, to cope
Each with his fronting foe.—*Milnes.*

On so great and uncommon an occasion as Mr. Ringgan's giving a dinner-party, the disused front parlour was opened and set in order; the women-folks, as he called them, wanting the whole back part of the house for their operations. So when the visitors arrived, in good time, they were ushered into a large, square, bare-looking room—a strong contrast even to their dining-room at the Pool—which gave them nothing of the welcome of the pleasant farm-house kitchen, and where nothing of the comfort of the kitchen found its way but a very strong smell of roast pig. There was the cheerless air of a place where nobody lives, or thinks of living.

The very chairs looked as if they had made up their minds to be forsaken for a term of months; it was impossible to imagine that a cheerful supper had ever been laid upon the stiff, cold-looking table that stood with its leaves down so primly against the wall. All that a blazing fire could do to make amends for deficiences, it did; but the wintry wind that swept round the house shook the paper window-shades in a remorseless way; and the utmost effort of said fire could not prevent it from coming in and giving disagreeable impertinent whispers at the ears of everybody.

Mr. Ringgan's welcome, however, was and would have been the same thing anywhere—genial, frank, and dignified; neither he nor it could be changed by circumstances. Mr. Carleton admired anew, as he came forward, the fine presence and noble look of his old host; a look that it was plain had never needed to seek the ground; a brow that in large or small things had never been crossed by a shadow of shame.

Fleda's keen-sighted affection was heartily gratified by the manner in which her grandfather was greeted by at least one of his guests and that the one about whose opinions he cared the most. Mr. Carleton seemed as little sensible of the cold room as Mr. Ringgan himself. Fleda felt sure that her grandfather was appreciated.

It is not too much to say that the entertainment provided in the kitchen gave perfect satisfaction to everybody—better fate than attends most entertainments. Even Mr. Rossitur's ruffled spirit felt the soothing influence of good cheer, to which he happened to be peculiarly sensible, and came back to its average condition of amenity.

Doubtless that was a most informal table, spread according to no rules that for many generations at least have been known in the refined world; an anomaly in the eyes of certainly one of the company. Yet the board had a character of its own, very far removed from vulgarity, and suiting remarkably well with the condition and demeanour of those who presided over it—a comfortable, well-to-do, substantial look, that could afford to dispense with minor graces; a self-respect that was not afraid of criticism. Aunt Miriam's successful efforts deserve to be celebrated.

In the middle of the table the polished amber of the pig's arched back elevated itself—a striking object—but worthy of the place he filled, as the honours paid him by everybody abundantly testified. Aunt Miriam had sent down a basket of her own bread, made out of the new flour, brown and white,

both as sweet and fine as it is possible for bread to be; the piled-up slices were really beautiful, The superb butter had come from Aunt Miriam's dairy too, for on such an occasion she would not trust to the very doubtful excellence of Miss Cynthia's doings. Every spare place on the table was filled with dishes of potatoes and pickles and sweetmeats, that left nothing to be desired in their respective kinds; the cake was a delicious presentment of the finest of material; and the pies, pumpkin pies, such as only Aunt Miriam could make, rich compounds of everything but pumpkin, with enough of that to give them a name—Fleda smiled to think how pleased Aunt Miriam must secretly be to see the homage paid her through them. And most happily Mrs. Plumfield had discovered that the last tea Mr. Ringgan had brought from the little Queechy store was not very good, and there was no time to send up on "the hill" for more, so she made coffee. Verily it was not Mocha, but the thick yellow cream with which the cups were filled really made up the difference. The most curious palate found no want.

Everybody was in a high state of satisfaction, even to Miss Cynthia Gall; who having some lurking suspicion that Mrs. Plumfield might design to cut her out of her post of tea-making, had slipped herself into her usual chair behind the tea-tray before anybody else was ready to sit down. No one at table bestowed a thought upon Miss Cynthia, but as she thought of nothing else, she may be said to have had her fair share of attention. The most unqualified satisfaction, however, was no doubt little Fleda's. Forgetting with a child's happy readiness the fears and doubts which had lately troubled her, she was full of the present, enjoying with a most unselfish enjoyment everything that pleased anybody else. *She* was glad that the supper was a fine one, and so approved, because it was her grandfather's hospitality and her Aunt Miriam's housekeeping; little beside was her care for pies or coffee. She saw with secret glee the expression of both her aunt's and Mr. Ringgan's face; partly from pure sympathy, and partly because, as she knew, the cause of it was Mr. Carleton, whom privately Fleda liked very much. And after all perhaps he had directly more to do with her enjoyment than all other causes together.

Certainly that was true of him with respect to the rest of the dinner-table. None at that dinner-table had ever seen the like. With all the graceful charm of manner with which he would have delighted a courtly circle, he came out from his

reserve and was brilliant, gay, sensible, entertaining, and witty, to a degree that assuredly has very rarely been thrown away upon an old farmer in the country and his unpolite sister. They appreciated him, though, as well as any courtly circle could have done, and he knew it. In Aunt Miriam's strong, sensible face, when not full of some hospitable care, he could see the reflection of every play of his own ; the grave practical eye twinkled and brightened, giving a ready answer to every turn of sense or humour in what he was saying. Mr. Ringgan, as much of a child for the moment as Fleda herself, had lost everything disagreeable and was in the full genial enjoyment of talk, rather listening than talking, with his cheeks in a perpetual dimple of gratification, and a low laugh of hearty amusement now and then rewarding the conversational and kind efforts of his guests with a complete triumph. Even the subtle charm which they could not quite recognise wrought fascination. Rossitur—his good humour was entirely restored —but whether even Mr. Carleton's power could have achieved that without the perfect seasoning of the pig and the smooth persuasion of the richly-creamed coffee, it may perhaps be doubted. He stared, mentally, for he had never known his friend condescend to bring himself out in the same manner before ; and he wondered what he could see in the present occasion to make it worth while.

But Mr. Carleton did not think his efforts thrown away. He understood and admired his fine old host and hostess ; and with all their ignorance of conventionalities and absence of what is called *polish* of manner, he could enjoy the sterling sense, the good feeling, the true, hearty hospitality, and the dignified courtesy, which both of them showed. No matter of the outside ; this was in the grain. If mind had lacked much opportunity it had also made good use of a little ; his host, Mr. Carleton found, had been a great reader, was well acquainted with history and a very intelligent reasoner upon it ; and both he and his sister shewed a strong and quick aptitude for intellectual subjects of conversation. No doubt Aunt Miriam's courtesy had not been taught by a dancing-master, and her brown satin gown had seen many a fashion come and go since it was made, but a *lady* was in both ; and while Rossitur covertly smiled, Mr. Carleton paid his sincere respect where he felt it was due. Little Fleda's quick eye hardly saw, but more than half felt, the difference. Mr. Carleton had no more eager listener than she, and perhaps none whose unaffected interest and sympathy gave him more pleasure.

When they rose from the table, Mr. Ringgan would not be *insinuated* into the cold front room again.

"No, no," said he, "what's the matter? the table? Push the table back, and let it take care of itself. Come, gentlemen, sit down—draw up your chairs round the fire, and a fig for ceremony! Comfort, sister Miriam, against politeness, any day in the year; don't you say so too, Fairy? Come here by me."

"Miss Fleda," said Mr. Carleton, "will you take a ride with me to Montepoole to-morrow? I should like to make you acquainted with my mother."

Fleda coloured and looked at her grandfather.

"What do you say, deary?" he inquired fondly; "will you go? I believe, sir, your proposal will prove a very acceptable one. You will go, won't you, Fleda?"

Fleda would very much rather not! But she was always exceedingly afraid of hurting people's feelings; she could not bear that Mr. Carleton should think she disliked to go with him, so she answered yes, in her usual sober manner.

Just then the door opened, and a man unceremoniously walked in, his entrance immediately following a little sullen knock that had made a mockery of asking permission. An ill-looking man, in the worst sense; his face being a mixture of cunning, meanness, and insolence. He shut the door and came with a slow leisurely step into the middle of the room without speaking a word. Mr. Carleton saw the blank change in Fleda's face. She knew him.

"Do you wish to see me, Mr. McGowan?" said Mr. Ringgan, not without something of the same change.

"I guess I ha'n't come here for nothing," was the gruff retort.

"Wouldn't another time answer as well?"

"I don't mean to find you here another time," said the man, chuckling. "I have given you notice to quit, and now I have come to tell you you'll clear out. I ain't a-going to be kept out of my property for ever. If I can't get my money from you, Elzevir Ringgan, I'll see you don't get no more of it in your hands."

"Very well, sir," said the old gentleman; "you have said all that is necessary."

"You have got to hear a little more, though," returned the other. "I've an idee that there's a satisfaction in speaking one's mind. I'll have that much out of you! Mr. Ringgan. A man hadn't ought to make an agreement to pay what he doesn't *mean* to pay, and what he has made an agreement to

pay he ought to meet and be up to, if he sold his soul for it! You call yourself a Christian, do you, to stay in another man's house, month after month, when you know you ha'n't got the means to give him the rent for it! That's what *I* call stealing, and it's what I'd live in the County House before I'd demean myself to do! and so ought you."

"Well, well! neighbour," said Mr. Ringgan, with patient dignity, "it's no use calling names. You know as well as I do how all this came about. I hoped to be able to pay you, but I haven't been able to make it out, without having more time."

"Time!" said the other. "Time to cheat me out of a little more house-room. If I was agoing to live on charity, Mr. Ringgan, I'd come and say so, and not put my hand in a man's pocket this way. You'll quit the house by the day after to-morrow, or if you don't I'll let you hear a little more of me that you won't like!"

He stalked out, shutting the door after him with a bang. Mr. Carleton had quitted the room a moment before him.

Nobody moved or spoke at first, when the man was gone, except Miss Cynthia, who as she was taking something from the table to the pantry remarked probably for Mr. Rossitur's benefit, that "Mr. Ringgan had to have that man punished for something he did a few years ago when he was justice of the peace, and she guessed likely that was the reason he had a grudge agin him ever since." Beyond this piece of dubious information nothing was said. Little Fleda stood beside her grandfather with a face of quiet distress; the tears silently running over her flushed cheeks, and her eyes fixed upon Mr. Ringgan with a tender touching look of sympathy, most pure from self-recollection.

Mr. Carleton presently came in to take leave of the disturbed family. The old gentleman rose and returned his shake of the hand with even a degree more than usual of his manly dignity, or Mr. Carleton thought so.

"Good-day to you, sir!" he said heartily. "We have had a great deal of pleasure in your society, and I shall always be very happy to see you—wherever I am." And then following him to the door and wringing his hand with a force he was not at all aware of, the old gentleman added in a lower tone, "I shall let her go with you!"

Mr. Carleton read his whole story in the stern self-command of brow, and the slight convulsion of feature which all the self-command could not prevent. He returned warmly the

grasp of the hand, answering merely, "I will see you again."

Fleda wound her arms round her grandfather's neck when they were gone, and did her best to comfort him, assuring him that "they would be just as happy somewhere else." And Aunt Miriam earnestly proffered her own home. But Fleda knew that her grandfather was not comforted. He stroked her head with the same look of stern gravity and troubled emotion which had grieved her so much the other day. She could not win him to a smile, and went to bed at last feeling desolate. She cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

He from his old hereditary nook
Must part, the summons came—our final leave we take.
—*Wordsworth.*

Mr. Carleton came the next day, but not early, to take Fleda to Montepoole. She had told her grandfather that she did not think he would come, because after last night he must know that she would not want to go. About twelve o'clock however he was there, with a little waggon, and Fleda was fain to get her sun-bonnet and let him put her in. Happily, it was her maxim never to trust to uncertainties, so she was quite ready when he came and they had not to wait a minute.

Though Fleda had a little dread of being introduced to a party of strangers and was a good deal disappointed at being obliged to keep her promise, she very soon began to be glad. She found her fear gradually falling away before Mr. Carleton's quiet, kind, reassuring manner; and she presently made up her mind that he would manage the matter so that it would not be awkward. They had so much pleasant talk, too.

When Mr. Carleton asked after her grandfather, Fleda answered with great animation, "Oh, he's very well! and such

a happy thing. You heard what that man said last night, Mr. Carleton, didn't you ? "

" Yes."

" Well, it is all arranged ; this morning Mr. Jolly—he's a friend of grandpa's that lives over at Queechy Run and knew about all this—he's a lawyer—he came this morning and told grandpa that he had found someone that could lend him the money he wanted, and there was no trouble about it ; and we are so happy, for we thought we should have to go away from where we live now, and I know grandpa would have felt it dreadfully. If it hadn't been for that, I mean, for Mr. Jolly's coming, I couldn't have gone to Montepoole to-day."

" Then I am very glad Mr. Jolly made his appearance," said Mr. Carleton.

" So am I," said Fleda ; " but I think it was a little strange that Mr. Jolly wouldn't tell us who it was that he had got the money from. Grandpa said he never saw Mr. Jolly so curious."

When they got to the Poole, Fleda's nervousness returned a little ; but she went through the dreaded introduction with great demureness and perfect propriety. And throughout the day Mr. Carleton had no reason to fear rebuke for the judgment which he had pronounced upon his little paragon. All the flattering attention which was shewn to her, and it was a good deal, could not draw Fleda a line beyond the dignified simplicity which seemed natural to her ; any more than the witty attempts at raillery and endeavours to amuse themselves at her expense, in which some of the gentlemen shewed their wisdom, could move her from her modest self-possession. *Very* quiet, *very* modest, as she invariably was, awkwardness could not fasten upon her ; her colour might come and her timid eye fall, it often did ; but Fleda's wits were always in their place and within call. She was kept to dinner ; and though the arrangement and manner of the service must have been strange to little Fleda, it was impossible to guess from word or look that it was the first time within her recollection that she had ever seen the like. Her native instincts took it all as quietly as any old liberalized traveller looks upon the customs of a new country.

On the whole, Fleda was exceedingly well pleased with her day, and thought all the people in general very kind. The drive home, through the gathering shades of twilight, was to little Fleda thoroughly charming. It was almost in perfect silence, but she liked that ; and all the way home her mind

was full of a shadowy beautiful world that seemed to lie before and around her.

It was a happy child that Mr. Carleton lifted from the waggon when they reached Queechy.

"Thank you, Mr. Carleton," she said, when she had reached her own door (he would not go in); "I have had a very nice time!"

He smiled. "Good night," said he. "Tell your grandfather I will come to-morrow to see him about some business."

Fleda ran gaily into the kitchen. Only Cynthia was there.

"Where is grandpa, Cynthy?"

"He went off into his room a half an hour ago. I believe he's layin' down. He ain't right well, I 'spect."

Her gaiety suddenly sobered, she took off her bonnet and coat and throwing them down in the kitchen stole softly along the passage to her grandfather's room. She stopped a minute at the door and held her breath, to see if she could hear any movement which might tell her he was not asleep. It was all still, and pulling the iron latch with her gentlest hand, Fleda went on tiptoe into the room. He was lying on the bed, but awake, for she had made no noise, and the blue eyes opened and looked upon her as she came near.

"Are you not well, dear grandpa?" said the little girl.

"Not exactly, dear!" he replied.

There was the shadow of somewhat in his tone that fell upon his little granddaughter's heart and brow at once. Her voice next time, though not suffered to be anything but clear and cheerful still, had in part the clearness of apprehension.

"What is the matter?"

"Oh—I don't know, dear!"

She felt the shadow again, and he seemed to say that time would show her the meaning of it.

He said no more; but Fleda's sobs said a great deal. He told her at last that she had better go to bed, and to say to Cynthy that he wanted to see her. She was going, and had reached the door, when he said—

"Elfleda!"

She hastened back to the bedside.

"Kiss me."

He let her do so twice, without moving, and then holding her to his breast he pressed one long, earnest, passionate kiss upon her lips, and released her.

Fleda told Cynthy that her grandfather wished her to come to him, and then mounted the stairs to her little bedroom.

She went to the window and opening it looked out at the soft moonlit sky.

As she stood there at the window, gazing out aimlessly into the still night she heard Cynthy at the back of the house calling out, but as if she were afraid of making too much noise, "Watkins! Watkins!"

Fleda instinctively held her breath to listen. Presently she heard Watkins reply; but they were all round the corner, she could not easily make out what they said. It was only by straining her ears that she caught the words—

"Watkins, Mr. Ringgan wants you to go to Miss Plumfield's and tell her he wants her to come right down—he thinks" —the voice of the speaker fell, and Fleda could only make out the last words, "Dr. James." More was said, but so thick and low that she could understand nothing.

She had heard enough. She hastily went down the stairs into the kitchen.

"Cynthy, what is the matter with grandpa?"

"Why ain't you in bed, Flidda?" said Cynthy, with some sharpness.

"But tell me," said Fleda anxiously.

"I don't know as there's anything the matter with him," said Cynthy. "Nothing much, I suppose. What makes you think anything is the matter?"

"Because I heard you telling Watkins to go for aunt Miriam," Fleda could not say, "and the doctor."

"Well, your grandpa thought he'd like to have her come down, and he don't feel right well, so I sent Watkins up; but you'd better go to bed, Flidda; you'll catch cold if you sit up o'night."

Fleda was unsatisfied, the more because Cynthy would not meet the keen searching look with which the little girl tried to read her face. She was not to be sent to bed, and all Cynthy's endeavours to make her change her mind were of no avail. Fleda sat down in the chimney corner, resolved to wait till her Aunt Miriam came.

It was a miserable three-quarters of an hour. When at last she saw the cloak and hood of Aunt Miriam coming through the moonlight to the kitchen door, she rushed to open it, and quite overcome for the moment threw her arms around her and was speechless. Aunt Miriam's tender and quiet voice comforted her.

"You up yet, Fleda! Hadn't you better go to bed? 'Tisn't good for you."

"That's what I've been a telling her," said Cynthy, "but she wa'nt a mind to listen to me."

But the two little arms embraced Aunt Miriam's cloak and wrappers and the little face was hid there still, and Fleda's answer was a half-smothered ejaculation.

"I am *so* glad you are come, dear Aunt Miriam!"

Aunt Miriam kissed her again, and again repeated her request.

"Oh, no; I can't go to bed," said Fleda, crying; "I can't till I know, I am *sure* something is the matter, or Cynthy wouldn't look so. *Do* tell me, Aunt Miriam!"

"I can't tell you anything, dear, except that grandpa is not well; that is all I know, I am going in to see him. I will tell you in the morning how he is."

"No," said Fleda. "I will wait here till you come out; I couldn't sleep."

Mrs. Plumfield made no more efforts to persuade her, but went into Mr. Ringgan's room. Fleda placed herself again in her chimney-corner.

"Don't you think the doctor is a long time coming, Cynthy?" said she, raising her head at last. Her question, breaking that forced silence, sounded fearful.

"It seems a kind a' long," said Cynthy. "I guess Watkins ha'n't found him to hum."

Watkins indeed presently came in and reported as much; and then his heavy boots were heard going up the stairs to his room overhead; but Fleda listened in vain for the sound of the latch of her grandfather's door, or Aunt Miriam's quiet foot-fall in the passage; listened and longed, till the minutes seemed like the links of a heavy chain which she was obliged to pass over from hand to hand, and the last link could not be found. The noise of Watkins' feet ceased overhead, and nothing stirred or moved but the crackling flames and Cynthia's elbows, which took turns each in resting upon the opposite arm, and now and then a tell-tale gust of wind in the trees. If Mr. Ringgan was asleep, why did not Aunt Miriam come out and see them—if he was better, why not come out and tell them so? He had been asleep when she first went into his room, and she had come back for a minute then to try again to get Fleda to bed; why could she not come out for a minute once more. Two hours of watching and trouble had quite changed little Fleda; the dark ring of anxiety had come under each eye in her little pale face; she looked herself almost ill.

Aunt Miriam's grave step was heard coming out of the room at last; it did not sound cheerfully in Fleda's ears. She came in, and walked up to Fleda.

Fleda looked up anxiously in her face. "How is he?"

But her next word was the wailing cry of sorrow, "Oh, grandpa!——"

The old lady took the little child in her arms and they both sat there by the fire until the morning dawned.

CHAPTER VIII.

Patience and sorrow strove
Who should express her goodliest.—*King Lear.*

When Mr. Carleton knocked at the front door the next day about two o'clock, it was opened to him by Cynthy. He asked for his late host.

"Mr. Ringgan is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed the young man, much shocked. "When? how?"

"Won't you come in, sir?" said Cynthy; "maybe you'll see Mis' Plumfield."

"No, certainly," replied the visitor. "Only tell me about Mr. Ringgan."

"He died last night."

"What was the matter with him?"

"I don't know," said Cynthy, in a business-like tone of voice. "I s'pose the doctor knows, but he didn't say nothing about it. He died very sudden."

"Was he alone?"

"No, his sister was with him; he had been complaining all the evening that he didn't feel right, but I didn't think nothing of it, and I didn't know as he did; and towards evening he went and laid down. All of a sudden he just riz up half-

way in bed and fell back and died,—with no more warning than that."

"And how is the little girl?"

"Why," said Cynthy, looking off at right angles from her visitor, "she's middling now, I 'spose, but she won't be before long, or else she must be harder to make sick than other folks. We can't get her out of the room."

"*The room?*" said Mr. Carleton. "The room where the body lies?"

"Yes—it's dreadful chill in there when the stove ain't heated, and she sits there the hull time. And she ha'n't got much to boast of now; she looks as if a feather would blow her away."

The door at the further end of the hall opened about two inches and a voice called out through the crack—

"Cynthy!—Mis' Plumfield wants to know if that is Mr. Carleton?"

"Yes."

"Well, she'd like to see him. Ask him to walk into the front room, she says." Cynthy upon this shewed the way, and Mr. Carleton walked into the same room where a very few days before he had been so kindly welcomed by his fine old host.

Mrs. Plumfield presently came in, and met him with the calm dignity of that sorrow which needs no parade, and that truth and meekness of character which can make none. Yet there was nothing like stoicism, no affected or proud repression of feeling; her manner was simply the dictate of good sense borne out by a firm and quiet spirit.

After quietly receiving Mr. Carleton's silent grasp of the hand, Aunt Miriam said—"I troubled you to stop, sir, that I might ask you how much longer you expect to stop at Montepoole."

"Not more than two or three days," he said.

"I understood," said Aunt Miriam after a minute's pause, "that Mrs. Carleton was so kind as to say she would take care of Elfleda to France and put her in the hands of her aunt."

"She would have great pleasure in doing it," said Mr. Carleton. "I can promise for your little niece that she shall have a mother's care so long as my mother can render it."

Aunt Miriam was silent, and he saw her eyes fill.

"You should not have had the pain of seeing me to-day," he said gently, "if I could have known it would give you any; but since I am here, may I ask whether it is your determination that Fleda shall go with us?"

"It was my brother's," said Aunt Miriam, sighing; "he told me, last night, that he wished her to go with Mrs. Carleton, if she would still be so good as to take her."

"I have just heard about her from the housekeeper," said Mr. Carleton, "what has disturbed me a good deal. Will you forgive me if I venture to propose that she should come to us at once. Of course, we will not leave the place for several days —till you are ready to part with her."

Aunt Miriam hesitated, and again the tears flushed to her eyes.

"I believe it would be best," she said, "since it must be. I cannot get the child away from her grandfather; I am afraid I want firmness to do it, and she ought not to be there; she is a tender little creature——"

For once self-command failed her; she was obliged to cover her face.

"A stranger's hands cannot be more tender of her than ours will be," said Mr. Carleton, his warm pressure of Aunt Miriam's hand repeating the promise. "My mother will bring a carriage for her this afternoon, if you will permit."

"If you please, sir, since it must be, it does not matter a day sooner or later," repeated Aunt Miriam; "if she can be got away, I don't know whether it will be possible."

Mr. Carleton promised to be there again in a few hours, and took his leave.

He came, with his mother, about five o'clock in the afternoon. Aunt Miriam received them, but said she was afraid their coming would be in vain; she had talked with Fleda about the proposed plan and could not get her to listen to it.

"Mother, will you see what you can do?" said Mr. Carleton.

Mrs. Carleton went, with an expression of face that her son, nobody else, knew meant that she thought it a particularly disagreeable piece of business. She came back after the lapse of a few minutes, in tears.

"I can do nothing with her," she said hurriedly; "I don't know what to say to her; and she looks like death. Go yourself, Guy; you can manage her if anyone can."

Mr. Carleton went immediately.

The room into which a short passage admitted him was cheerless indeed. One corner of the room was sadly tenanted by the bed which held the remains of its late master and owner. At a little table between the windows, with her back turned towards the bed, Fleda was sitting, her face bowed in her hands

upon the old quarto Bible that lay there open ; a shawl round her shoulders.

Mr. Carleton went up to the side of the table and softly spoke her name. Fleda looked up at him for an instant, and then buried her face in her hands on the book as before.

" Fleda," said Mr. Carleton, after a moment, " you must come with me."

The words were gently and tenderly spoken, yet they had that tone which young and old instinctively know it is vain to dispute. Fleda glanced up again, a touching, imploring look it was very difficult to bear, and her " Oh no, I cannot," went to his heart. It was not resistance but entreaty, and all the arguments she would have urged seemed to lie in the mere tone of her voice. Mr. Carleton was moved, but not shaken in his purpose. He was silent a moment, drawing back the hair that fell over Fleda's forehead with a gentle caressing touch ; and then he said, still lower and more tenderly than before, but without flinching, " You must come with me, Fleda."

" Mayn't I stay ? " said Fleda, sobbing, while he could see in the tension of the muscles a violent effort at self-control which he did not like to see, " mayn't I stay till—till—the day after to-morrow ? "

" No, dear Fleda," said he, still stroking her head kindly. " I will bring you back, but you must go with me now. Your aunt wishes it, and we all think it is best. I will bring you back."

She sobbed bitterly for a few minutes. Then she begged in smothered words that he would leave her alone a little while. He went immediately.

She checked her sobs when she heard the door close upon him, and rising went and knelt down by the side of the bed. Then she leaned forward, over the loved face that in death had kept all its wonted look of mildness and placid dignity. It was in vain to try to look through Fleda's blinded eyes ; the hot tears dropped fast, while her trembling lips kissed—and kissed, those cold and silent that could make no return ; and then feeling that it was the last, that the parting was over, she stood by the side of the bed in a convulsion of grief, her face bowed down and her little frame racked with feelings too strong for it, shaken visibly, as if too frail to bear the trial to which it was put.

Mr. Carleton had waited and waited, as he thought long enough, and now at last came in again. He put his arm round

the child and gently drew her away, and sitting down took her on his knee; and endeavoured rather with actions than with words to soothe and comfort her; for he did not know what to say. But his gentle delicate way, the soft touch with which he again stroked back her hair or took her hand, speaking kindness and sympathy, the loving pressure of his lips once or twice to her brow, the low tones in which he told her that she was making herself sick, that she must not do so, and she must let him take care of her, were powerful to soothe or quiet a sensitive mind, and Fleda felt them. It was a very difficult task, and if undertaken by anyone else would have been more likely to disgust and distress her. But his spirit had taken the measure of hers, and he knew precisely how to temper every word and tone so as just to meet the nice sensibilities of her nature. He had said hardly anything, but she had understood all he meant to say, and when he told her at last, softly, that it was getting late and she must let him take her away, she made no more difficulty; rose up and let him lead her out of the room without once turning her head to look back.

Mrs. Carleton looked relieved that there was a prospect of getting away, and rose up with a happy adjusting of her shawl round her shoulders. Aunt Miriam came forward to say good-bye. Fleda clasped her round the neck convulsively for an instant, kissed her as if a kiss could speak a whole heartful, and then turned submissively to Mr. Carleton and let him lead her to the carriage.

There was no fault to be found with Mrs. Carleton's kindness when they were on the way. She held the forlorn little child tenderly in her arms, and told her how glad she was to have her with them, how glad she should be if she were going to keep her always; but her saying so only made Fleda cry, and she soon thought it best to say nothing. All the rest of the way Fleda was a picture of resignation; transparently pale, meek, and pure, and fragile seemingly, as the delicatest wood-flower that grows.

"You will order tea for us in your dressing-room, mother?" said Mr. Carleton.

"*Us*—who is *us*?"

"Fleda and me, unless you will please to make one of the party."

"Certainly I will, but perhaps Fleda might like it better downstairs. Wouldn't you, dear?"

"If you please, ma'am," said Fleda. "Wherever you please."

"But which would you rather, Fleda?" said Mr. Carleton.

"I would *rather* have it upstairs," said Fleda gently, "but it's no matter."

"We will have it upstairs," said Mrs. Carleton. "We will be a nice little party up there by ourselves. You shall not come down till you like."

"You are hardly able to walk up," said Mr. Carleton tenderly. "Shall I carry you?"

The tears rushed to Fleda's eyes, but she said no, and managed to mount the stairs, though it was evidently an exertion. Mrs. Carleton's dressing-room, as her son had called it, looked very pleasant when they got there.

The tea was made in that room for those three alone. Fleda knew that Mr. and Mrs. Carleton staid up there only for her sake, and it troubled her, but she could not help it. Neither could she be very sorry so far as one of them was concerned. Mr. Carleton was too good to be wished away. All that evening his care of her never ceased.

Her last words to him that night, spoken with a most wistful, anxious glance into his face, were—"You will take me back again, Mr. Carleton?"

He knew what she meant.

"Certainly I will. I promised you, Fleda."

"Whatever Guy promises you may be very sure he will do," said his mother, with a smile.

Fleda believed it. But the next morning it was very plain that this promise he would not be called upon to perform; Fleda would not be well enough to go to the funeral. She was able indeed to get up, but she lay all day upon the sofa in the dressing-room.

Instead of being better the next day, Fleda was not able to get up; she was somewhat feverish and exceedingly weak. She lay like a baby, Mrs. Carleton said, and gave as little trouble. Gentle and patient always, she made no complaint, and even uttered no wish, and whatever they did made no objection. Though many a tear that day and the following paid its faithful tribute to the memory of what she had lost, no one knew it; she was never seen to weep; and the very grave composure of her face and her passive unconcern as to what was done or doing around her alone gave her friends reason to suspect that the mind was not as quiet as the body. Mr. Carleton was the only one who saw deeper; the only one that guessed why the little hand often covered the eyes so

carefully, and read the very, very grave lines of the mouth that it could not hide.

As soon as she could bear it he had brought her out to the dressing-room again, and laid on the sofa; and it was several days before she could be got any further. But there he could be more with her and devote himself more to her pleasure; and it was not long before he had made himself necessary to the poor child's comfort in a way beyond what he was aware of.

He never seemed to lose sight of her. He was always doing something for which Fleda loved him, but so quietly and happily that she could neither help his taking the trouble nor thank him for it. It might have been matter of surprise that a gay young man of fashion should concern himself like a brother about the wants of a little child; the young gentlemen downstairs who were not of the society in the dressing-room did make themselves very merry upon the subject, and rallied Mr. Carleton with the common amount of wit and wisdom about his little sweetheart, a raillery which he met with the most flinty indifference. But none of those who saw Fleda ever thought strange of anything that was done for her; and Mrs. Carleton was rejoiced to have her son take up the task she was fain to lay down. So he really more than anyone else had the management of her; and Fleda invariably greeted his entrance into the room with a faint smile, which even the ladies who saw agreed was well worth working for.

CHAPTER IX.

If large possessions, pompous titles, honourable charges, and profitable commissions, could have made this proud man happy, there would have been nothing wanting.—*L'Estrange.*

SEVERAL days had passed. Fleda's cheeks had gained no colour, but she had grown a little stronger, and it was thought the party might proceed on their way without any more

tarrying; trusting that change and the motion of travelling would do better things for Fleda than could be hoped from any further stay at Montepoole. The matter was talked over in an evening consultation in the dressing-room, and it was decided that they would set off on the second day thereafter.

Fleda was lying quietly on her sofa, with her eyes closed, having had nothing to say during the discussion. They thought she had perhaps not heard it. Mr. Carleton's sharper eyes, however, saw that one or two tears were glimmering just under the eyelash. He bent down over her and whispered—

"I know what you are thinking of, Fleda, do I not?"

"I was thinking of Aunt Miriam," Fleda said in an answering whisper, without opening her eyes.

"I will take care of that."

Fleda looked up and smiled most expressively her thanks, and in five minutes was asleep.

The next day Fleda was well enough to bear moving. Mr. Carleton had her carefully bundled up, and then carried her downstairs and placed her in the little light waggon which had once before brought her to the Pool. Mr. Carleton drove her down to Aunt Miriam's, and leaving her there he went off again; and whatever he did with himself it was a good two hours before he came back.

He found her sitting happily in Aunt Miriam's lap. The old lady held her close for a few minutes in silence.

"Elfleda," said Aunt Miriam gravely and tenderly, "do you know what was your mother's prayer for you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"What was it?"

"That I—might be ——"

"Unspotted from the world!" repeated Aunt Miriam, in a tone of tender and deep feeling; "my sweet blossom! how wilt thou keep so? Will you remember always your mother's prayer?"

"I will try."

"How will you try, Fleda?"

"I will pray."

"Do you think that is possible?" said Mr. Carleton significantly, when a few moments after they had risen and were about to separate. Aunt Miriam looked at him in surprise and asked—

"What, sir?"

"To live in the world and not be like the world?"

She cast her eyes upon Fleda, fondly smoothing down her

soft hair with both hands for a minute or two before she answered—

"By the help of one thing, sir, yes!"

"And what is that?" said he quickly.

"The blessing of God, with whom all things are possible."

His eyes fell, and there was a kind of incredulous sadness in his half smile which Aunt Miriam understood better than he did. She sighed as she folded Fleda again to her breast and whisperingly bade her "Remember." But Fleda knew nothing of it; and when she had finally parted from Aunt Miriam and was seated in the little waggon on her way home, to her fancy the best friend she had in the world was sitting beside her.

Neither was her judgment wrong, so far as it went. She saw true where she saw at all. But there was a great deal she could not see.

Mr. Carleton was an unbeliever. Not maliciously, not wilfully, not stupidly; rather the fool of circumstance. His scepticism might be traced to the joint workings of a very fine nature and a very bad education. That is, education in the broad sense of the term; of course, none of the means and appliances of mental culture had been wanting to him.

Of religion Mr. Carleton had nothing at all, and a true Christian character had never crossed his path near enough for him to become acquainted with it. His mother was a woman of the world; his father had been a man of the world; and, what is more, so deep-dyed a politician that to all intents and purposes, except as to bare natural affection, he was nothing to his son and his son was nothing to him. Both mother and father thought the son a piece of perfection, and mothers and fathers have very often indeed thought so on less grounds. Mr. Carleton saw, whenever he took time to look at him, that Guy had no lack of either quick wit or manly bearing; that he had pride enough to keep him from low company, and make him abhor low pursuits; if anything more than pride and better than pride mingled with it, the father's discernment could not reach so far.

It is said that everybody has his niche, failing to find which nobody fills his place or acts his part in society. Mr. Carleton could not find his niche, and he consequently grew dissatisfied everywhere. His mother's hopes from the University and the World were sadly disappointed.

At the University he had not lost his time. The pride of

character which joined with less estimable pride of birth was a marked feature in his composition, made him look with scorn upon the ephemeral pursuits of one set of young men; while his strong intellectual tastes drew him in the other direction; and the energetic activity which drove him to do everything well that he once took in hand, carried him to high distinction. Being there he would have disdained to be anywhere but at the top of the tree. But out of the University and in possession of his estates, what should he do with himself and them?

A question easy to settle by most young men! very easy to settle by Guy if he had had the clue of Christian truth to guide him through the labyrinth. But the clue was wanting, and the world seemed to him a world of confusion.

It was a busy world, but to him people seemed to be busy upon trifles, or working in a circle, or working mischief; and his nice notions of what *ought to be* were shocked by what he saw *was*, in every direction around him. The Church played at shuttlecock with men's credulousness, the law with their purses, the medical profession with their lives, the military with their liberties and hopes. He acknowledged that in all these lines of action there was much talent, much good intention, much admirable diligence and acuteness brought out—but to what general end? He saw, in short, that the machinery of the human mind, both at large and in particular, was out of order. He did not know what was the broken wheel the want of which set all the rest to running wrong.

Conscience is often morbidly far-sighted. Mr. Carleton had a very large tenantry around him and depending upon him, in bettering whose condition, if he had but known it, all those energies might have found full play. It never entered into his head. He abhorred *business*, the detail of business; and his fastidious tastes especially shrank from having anything to do among those whose business was literally their life. The eye sensitively fond of elegance, the extreme of elegance, in everything, and permitting no other around or about him, could not bear the tokens of mental and bodily wretchedness among the ignorant poor; he escaped from them as soon as possible; though that poverty was one of the irregularities of this wrong-working machine of a world, and something utterly beyond his power to do away or alleviate; and left to his steward all the responsibility that of right rested on his own shoulders.

And at last, unable to content himself in the old routine of

things, he quitted home and England, even before he was of age, and roved from place to place, trying, and trying in vain, to soothe the vague restlessness that called for a very different remedy.

CHAPTER X.

Faire Christabelle, that ladye bright,
Was had forth of the towre:
But ever she droopeth in her minde,
As, nipt by an ungentle winde,
Doth some faire lillye flowre.—*Syr Cauline.*

THAT evening, the last of their stay at Montepoole, Fleda was thought well enough to take her tea in company. So Mr. Carleton carried her down, though she could have walked, and placed her on the sofa in the parlour.

Fleda was quite touched with everybody's kindness, but somebody at the back of the sofa whom she did not see was the greatest comfort of all.

"How are we going to proceed to-morrow, Mr. Evelyn?" said Mrs. Carleton. "Has the missing stage-coach returned yet? or will it be forthcoming in the morning?"

"Promised, Mrs. Carleton. The landlord's faith stands pledged for it."

"How many will it hold?" inquired Mrs. Carleton.

"Hum!—Nine inside, I suppose."

"And we number ten, with the servants."

"Just take us," said Mr. Evelyn. "There's room on the box for one."

"It will not take me," said Mr. Carleton.

"How will you go? ride?" said his mother. "I should think you would, since you have found a horse you like so well."

"You may put Fleda out of your calculations too, mother," said Mr. Carleton. "I will take care of her."

"How in the world," exclaimed his mother, "if you are on horseback?"

"But, Carleton!" cried Rossitur impatiently, "you can't ride so! You'll find it deucedly inconvenient."

"Possibly," said Mr. Carleton.

"But there is somebody else that deserves to be consulted," said Mrs. Thorn. "I wonder how little Fleda will like it."

"I will ask her when we get to our first stopping-place," said Mr. Carleton smiling.

Fleda would hardly have said a word if his purpose had been to put her under the horse's feet instead of on his back. But she came forward the next morning with great unwillingness and a very tremulous little heart. He must have understood the want of alacrity in her face and manner, though he took no notice of it otherwise than by the gentle kindness with which he led her to the horse-block and placed her upon it. Then mounting, and riding the horse up close to the block, he took Fleda in both hands, and bidding her spring, in a moment she was safely seated before him.

At first it seemed dreadful to Fleda to have that great horse's head so near her, and she was afraid that her feet touching him would excite his most serious disapprobation. However, a minute or so went by and she could not see that his tranquillity seemed to be at all ruffled, or even that he was sensible to her being upon his shoulders. They waited to see the stage-coach off, and then gently set forward. Fleda feared very much again when she felt the horse moving under her, easy as his gait was, and, looking after the stage-coach, in the distance, now beyond call, she felt a little as if she was a great way from help and dry land, cast away on a horse's back. But Mr. Carleton's arm was gently passed round her, and she knew it held her safely and would not let her fall, and he bent down his face to her and asked her so kindly and tenderly, and with such a look too, that seemed to laugh at her fears, whether she felt afraid?—and with such a kind little pressure of his arm that promised to take care of her,—that Fleda's courage mounted twenty degrees at once. And it rose higher every minute; the horse went very easily, and Mr. Carleton held her so that she could not be tired, and made her lean against him; and before they had gone a mile Fleda began to be delighted. Such a charming way of travelling!

"I am afraid I tire you, Mr. Carleton," said she, in a sudden fit of recollection, starting up.

His look answered her, and his arm drew her back to her place again.

"Are *you* not tired, Elfie?"

"Oh, no! You have got a new name for me, Mr. Carleton," said she a moment after, looking up and smiling.

"Do you like it?"

"Yes."

"You are my good genius," said he, "so I must have a peculiar title for you, different from what other people know you by."

They were passing Deepwater Lake, and would presently be at Aunt Miriam's. Fleda looked now with a beating heart. Every foot of ground was known to her. She was seeing it perhaps for the last time.

It was hard to go by Aunt Miriam's. Fleda eagerly looked, as well as she could, but no one was to be seen about the house. It was no use trying to help it; Fleda put her two hands to her face and cried at last, a silent but not a less bitter leave-taking of the shadows of the past.

She forced herself into quiet again, resolved to look to the last. As they were going down the hill they could see the poplar trees which skirted the courtyard fence before her grandfather's house. Her fortitude failed, and bowing her little head she wept so exceedingly that Mr. Carleton was fain to draw bridle and try to comfort her.

"My dear Elfie! do not weep so," he said tenderly. "Is there anything you would like? Can I do anything for you?"

"Oh, it's no matter," said Fleda, striving to conquer her tears. "If I only could have gone into the house once more! but it's no matter—you needn't wait, Mr. Carleton."

Mr. Carleton ordered his servant to open the gate, and rode up to the back of the house.

"I am afraid there is nobody here, Elfie," he said; "the house seems all shut up."

"I know how I can get in," said Fleda, "there's a window downstairs. I don't believe it is fastened; if you wouldn't mind waiting, Mr. Carleton,—I won't keep you long?"

The child had dried her tears, and there was the eagerness of something like hope in her face. Mr. Carleton dismounted and took her off.

"I must find a way to get in too, Elfie, I cannot let you go alone."

"Oh, I can open the door when I get in," said Fleda.

"But you have not the key."

"There's no key—it's only bolted on the inside, that door. I can open it."

She found the window unfastened, as she had expected; Mr. Carleton held it open while she crawled in, and then she undid the door for him. He more than half questioned the wisdom of his proceeding. The house had a dismal look; cold, empty, deserted, it was a dreary reminder of Fleda's loss, and he feared the effect of it would be anything but good. He followed and watched her, as with an eager business step she went through the hall and up the stairs, putting her head into every room and giving an earnest wistful look all round it. She said not a word during the whole time; her very crying was still.

She had left her grandfather's room for the last. Mr. Carleton did not follow her in there, guessing that she would rather be alone. But she did not come back, and he was forced to go to fetch her.

The chill desolateness of that room had been too much for poor little Fleda. The empty bedstead, the cold stove, the table bare of books, only one or two lay upon the old Bible, the forlorn order of the place that bespoke the master far away, the very sunbeams that stole in at the little windows and met now no answering look of gladness or gratitude, it had struck the child's heart too heavily, and she was standing crying by the window. A second time in that room Mr. Carleton sat down and drew his little charge to his breast and spoke words of soothing and sympathy.

"I am very sorry I brought you here, dear Elfie," he said kindly. "It was too hard for you."

"Oh no!" even through her tears Fleda said, "she was very glad!"

"Hadn't we better try to overtake our friends?" he whispered, after another pause.

She immediately, almost immediately, put away her tears, and with a quiet obedience that touched him went with him from the room; fastened the door, and got out again at the little window.

She was crying, however, constantly till they had gone several miles on their way again, and Mr. Carleton doubted he had done wrong. It passed away, and she had been sitting quite peacefully for some time, when he told her they were near the place where they were to stop and join their friends. She looked up most gratefully in his face.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Carleton, for what you did!"

"I was afraid I had made a mistake, Elfie."

"Oh no, you didn't."

"Do you think you feel any easier after it, Elfie?"

"Oh, yes! indeed I do," said she, looking up again. "Thank you, Mr. Carleton."

A gentle kind pressure of his arm answered her thanks.

CHAPTER XI.

Starres are poore books and oftentimes do misse;
This book of starres lights to eternall blisse.—*George Herbert.*

THE voyage across the Atlantic was not in itself at all notable. The fresh air began to restore Fleda immediately; she was no more sick; her appetite came back, and she mended rapidly. Mr. Carleton proved himself as good a nurse on the sea as on land. She seemed to be never far from his thoughts. He was continually finding out something that would do her good or please her; and Fleda could not discover that he took any trouble about it; she could not feel that she was a burden to him; the things seemed to come as a matter of course. Mrs. Carleton was not wanting in any show of kindness or care, and yet, when Fleda looked back upon the day, it somehow was Guy that had done everything for her; she thought little of thanking anybody but him.

One evening she had been some time alone, looking out upon the restless little waves that were tossing and tumbling in every direction. Mr. Carleton coming up saw her gazing out upon the water with an eye that seemed to see nothing.

"Elfie! Are you looking into futurity?"

"No. I was thinking," said Fleda slowly, "that the sea

seemed something like the world; I don't mean it was like, but it made me think of it; and I thought how pleasant it is to know that God takes care of His people."

"Don't he take care of everybody?"

"Yes, in one sort of way," said Fleda; "but then it is only His children that He has promised to keep from everything that will hurt them."

"I don't see how that promise is kept, Elfie. I think those who call themselves so meet with as many troubles as the rest of the world, and perhaps more."

"Yes," said Fleda quickly, "they have troubles, but then God won't let the troubles do them any harm."

A subtle evasion, thought Mr. Carleton. "Where did you learn that, Elfie?"

"The Bible says so," said Fleda.

"Well, how do you know it from that?" said Mr. Carleton, impelled, he hardly knew whether by his bad or his good angel, to carry on the conversation.

"Why," said Fleda, looking as if it were a very simple question and Mr. Carleton were catechising her, "you know, Mr. Carleton, the Bible was written by men who were taught by God exactly what to say, so there could be nothing in it that is not true."

"How do you know those men were so taught?"

"The Bible says so."

A child's answer! but with a child's wisdom in it, not learnt of the schools.

Mr. Carleton did not smile, for nothing would have tempted him to hurt her feelings; but he said, though conscience did not let him do it without a twinge—

"But don't you know, Elfie, there are some people who do not believe the Bible?"

"Ah, but those are bad people," replied Fleda quickly; "all good people believe it."

A child's reason again, but hitting the mark this time. Unconsciously, little Fleda had brought forward a strong argument for her cause. Mr. Carleton felt it, and rising up that he might not be obliged to say anything more, he began to pace slowly up and down the deck, turning the matter over.

Was it so? that there were hardly any good men (he thought there might be a few) who did not believe in the Bible and uphold its authority? and that all the worst portion of society was comprehended in the other class? and if so how had

he overlooked it? He had reasoned most unphilosophically from a few solitary instances that had come under his own eye; but applying the broad principle of induction it could not be doubted that the Bible was on the side of all that is sound, healthful, and hopeful, in this disordered world. And whatever might be the character of a few exceptions, it was not supposable that a wide system of hypocrisy should tell universally for the best interests of mankind. Summoning history to produce her witnesses, as he went on with his walk up and down, he saw with increasing interest, what he had never seen before, that the Bible had come like a breath of spring upon the moral waste of mind; that the ice-bound intellect and cold heart of the world had waked into life under its kindly influence, and that all the rich growth of the one and the other had come forth at its bidding. And except in that sun-lightened track, the world was and had been a waste indeed. Doubtless in that waste, intellect had at different times put forth sundry barren shoots, such as a vigorous plant can make in the absence of the sun, but also like them immature, unsound, and groping vainly after the light in which alone they could expand and perfect themselves; ripening no seed for a future and richer growth. And flowers the wilderness had none. The affections were stunted and overgrown.

Mr. Carleton was profoundly struck, and the thought recurred to him afterwards and was dwelt upon. He became more reserved and unsociable than ever. He wearied himself with thinking. If he could have got at the books, he would have spent his days and nights in studying the evidences of Christianity; but the ship was bare of any such books, and he never thought of turning to the most obvious of all, the Bible itself. His unbelief was shaken; it was within an ace of falling in pieces to the very foundation! or rather he began to suspect how foundationless it had been. It came at last to one point with him: if there were a God, He would not have left the world without a revelation,—no more would He have suffered that revelation to defeat its own end by becoming corrupted or alloyed; if there was such a revelation it could be no other than the Bible; and his acceptance of the whole scheme of Christianity now hung upon the turn of a hair. Yet he could not resolve himself. He balanced the counter doubts and arguments, on one side and on the other, and strained his mind to the task; he could not weigh them nicely enough. He was in a maze; and seeking to clear and calm his judgment that he might see the way out, it was in vain

that he tried to shake his dizzied head from the effect of the turns it had made. By dint of anxiety to find the right path reason had lost herself in the wilderness.

One evening Mr. Carleton had been a long while pacing up and down the deck in front of little Fleda's nest, thinking and thinking, without coming to any end. The ocean was very quiet, only broken into cheerful mites of waves that seemed to have nothing to do but sparkle. The sun's rays were almost level now, and a long path of glory across the seas led off towards his sinking disk. Fleda sat watching and enjoying it all in her happy fashion, which always made the most of everything good, and was especially quick in catching any form of natural beauty.

Mr. Carleton's thoughts were elsewhere; too busy to take note of things around him. Fleda looked now and then as he passed at his gloomy brow, wondering what he was thinking of, and wishing that he could have the same reason to be happy that she had. In one of his turns his eye met her gentle glance; and vexed and bewildered as he was with study, there was something in that calm, bright face that impelled him irresistibly to ask the little child to set the proud scholar right. Placing himself beside her, he said—

"Elfie, how do you know there is a God? What reason have you for thinking so out of the Bible?"

It was a strange look little Fleda gave him. He felt it at the time, and he never forgot it. Such a look of reproach, sorrow, and *pity*, he afterwards thought, as an angel's face might have worn. The *question* did not seem to occupy her a moment. After this answering look, she suddenly pointed to the sinking sun, and said—

"Who made that, Mr. Carleton?"

Mr. Carleton's eyes, following the direction of hers, met the long bright rays, whose still witness-bearing was almost too powerful to be borne. The sun was just dipping majestically into the sea, and its calm self-assertion seemed to him at that instant hardly stronger than its vindication of its Author.

A slight arrow may find the joint in the armour, before which many weightier shafts have fallen powerless. Mr. Carleton was an unbeliever no more from that time.

CHAPTER XII.

He borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman, and swore he would pay him again when he was able.—*Merchant of Venice.*

ONE other incident alone in the course of the voyage deserves to be mentioned, both because it served to bring out the characters of several people, and because it was not—what is ?—without its lingering consequences.

Thorn and Rossitur had kept up indefatigably the game of teasing Fleda about her " English admirer," as they sometimes styled him. Poor Fleda grew more and more sore on the subject. She thought it was very strange that two grown men could not find enough to do to amuse themselves without making sport of the comfort of a little child. She wondered they could take pleasure in what gave her so much pain ; but so it was ; and they had it up so often that at last others caught it from them ; and though not in malevolence, yet in thoughtless folly many a light remark was made and question asked of her that set little Fleda's sensitive nerves a-quivering. She was only too happy that they were never said before Mr. Carleton ; that would have been a thousand times worse. As it was, her gentle nature was constantly suffering from the pain or the fear of these attacks.

" Where's Mr. Carleton ? " said her cousin, coming up one day.

" I don't know," said Fleda ; " I don't know but he is gone up into one of the tops."

" Your humble servant leaves you to yourself a great while this morning, it seems to me. He is growing very inattentive."

" I wouldn't permit it, Miss Fleda, if I were you," said Thorn maliciously. " You let him have his own way too much."

" I wish you wouldn't talk so, cousin Charlton ! " said Fleda.

" But seriously," said Charlton, " I think you had better call him to account. He is very suspicious lately. I have observed him walking by himself and looking very glum indeed. I am afraid he has taken some fancy into his head that would not suit you. I advise you to inquire into it."

" I wouldn't give myself any concern about it ! " said Thorn lightly, enjoying the child's confusion and his own fanciful style of backbiting. " I'd let him go if he has a mind to, Miss Fleda. He's no such great catch. He's neither lord nor

knight, nothing in the world but a private gentleman; with plenty of money, I dare say; but you don't care for that; and there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. I don't think much of him!"

He is wonderfully better than *you*, thought Fleda, as she looked into the young gentleman's face for a second, but she said nothing.

"Why, Fleda," said Charlton, laughing, "it wouldn't be a killing affair, would it? How has this English admirer of yours got so far in your fancy? praising your pretty eyes, eh?"

"No," said Fleda, in displeasure, "he never says such things."

"No?" said Charlton. "What then? What does he say? I wouldn't let him make a fool of me if I were you, Fleda! Did he ever ask you for a kiss?"

"No!" exclaimed Fleda, half beside herself and bursting into tears; "I wish you wouldn't talk so! How can you?"

They had carried the game pretty far that time, and thought best to leave it. Fleda stopped crying as soon as she could, lest somebody should see her, and was sitting quietly again, alone as before, when one of the sailors whom she had never spoken to came by, and leaning over towards her with a leer as he passed, said—

"Is this the young English gentleman's little sweetheart?"

Poor Fleda! she had got more than she could bear. She jumped up and ran down into the cabin; and in her berth Mrs. Carleton found her some time afterwards, quietly crying, and most sorry to be discovered. She was exceeding unwilling to tell what had troubled her. Mrs. Carleton, really distressed, tried coaxing, soothing, reasoning, promising, in a way the most gentle and kind that she could use.

"Oh, it's nothing—it's nothing," said Fleda at last eagerly, —"it's because I am foolish—it's only something they said to me."

"Who, love?"

Again was Fleda most unwilling to answer, and it was after repeated urging that she at last said, "Cousin Charlton and Mr. Thorn."

"Charlton and Mr. Thorn! What did they say? What did they say, darling Fleda?"

"Oh, it's only that they tease me," said Fleda, trying hard to put an end to the tears which caused all this questioning, and to speak as if they were about a trifle. But Mrs. Carleton persisted.

"What do they say to tease you, love? what is it about? Guy, come in here and help me to find out what is the matter with Fleda."

Fleda hid her face in Mrs. Carleton's neck, resolved to keep her lips sealed. Mr. Carleton came in, but to her great relief his question was directed not to her but his mother.

"Fleda has been annoyed by something those young men, her cousin and Mr. Thorn, have said to her; they tease her, she says, and she will not tell me what it is."

Mr. Carleton did not ask, and he presently left the state-room.

"Oh, I am afraid he will speak to them!" exclaimed Fleda, as soon as he was gone. "Oh, I oughtn't to have said that!"

Mrs. Carleton tried to soothe her and asked what she was afraid of. But Fleda would not say any more. Her anxious fear that she had done mischief helped to dry her tears, and she sorrowfully resolved she would keep her griefs to herself next time.

Rossitur and Thorn were in company with a brother officer and friend of the latter when Mr. Carleton approached them.

"Mr. Rossitur and Mr. Thorn," said he, "you have indulged yourselves in a style of conversation extremely displeasing to the little girl under my mother's care. You will oblige me by abandoning it for the future."

There was certainly in Mr. Carleton's manner a sufficient degree of the cold haughtiness with which he usually expressed displeasure; though his words gave no other cause of offence. Thorn retorted rather insolently—

"I shall oblige myself in the matter, and do as I think proper."

"I have a right to speak as I please to my own cousin," said Rossitur sulkily, "without asking anybody's leave. I don't see what you have to do with it."

"Simply that she is under my protection, and that I will not permit her to be annoyed."

"I don't see how she is under your protection," said Rossitur.

"And I do not see how the potency of it will avail in this case," said his companion.

"Neither position is to be made out in words," said Mr. Carleton calmly. "You see that I desire there be no repetition of the offence. The rest I will endeavour to make clear if I am compelled to it."

"Stop, sir!" said Thorn, as the young Englishman was

turning away, adding with an oath, "I won't bear this! You shall answer this to me, sir!"

"Easily," said the other.

"And me too," said Rossitur. "You have an account to settle with me, Carleton."

"I will answer what you please," said Carleton carelessly, "and as soon as we get to land,—provided you do not in the meantime induce me to refuse you the honour."

However incensed, the young men endeavoured to carry it off with the same coolness that their adversary showed. No more words passed. But Mrs. Carleton, possibly quickened by Fleda's fears, was not satisfied with the carriage of all parties, and resolved to sound her son, happy in knowing that nothing but truth was to be had from him. She found an opportunity that very afternoon when he was sitting alone on the deck. The neighbourhood of little Fleda she hardly noticed. Fleda was curled up among her cushions, luxuriously bending over a little old black Bible which was very often in her hand at times when she was quiet and had no observation to fear.

"Reading!—always reading?" said Mrs. Carleton, as she came up and took a place by her son.

"By no means!" he said, closing his book with a smile; "not enough to tire anyone's eyes on this voyage, mother."

"I wish you liked intercourse with living society," said Mrs. Carleton, leaning her arm on his shoulder and looking at him rather wistfully.

"You need not wish that,—when it suits me," he answered.

"But none suits you. Is there any on board?"

"A small proportion," he said, with the slight play of feature which always effected a diversion of his mother's thoughts, no matter in what channel they had been flowing.

"But those young men," she said, returning to the charge,—"you hold yourself very much aloof from them?"

He did not answer, even by a look, but to his mother the perfectly quiet composure of his face was sufficiently expressive.

"I know what you think; but, Guy, you always had the same opinion of them?"

"I have never shown any other."

"Guy," she said, speaking low and rather anxiously, "have you got into trouble with those young men?"

"*I* am in no trouble, mother," he answered, somewhat haughtily. "I cannot speak for them."

Mrs. Carleton waited a moment.

"You have done something to displease them, have you not?"

"They have displeased me, which is somewhat more to the purpose."

"But their folly is nothing to you?"

"No,—not their folly."

"Guy," said his mother, again pausing a minute, and pressing her hand more heavily upon his shoulder, "you will not suffer this to alter the friendly terms you have been on?—whatever it be,—let it pass."

"Certainly—if they choose to apologise and behave themselves."

"What, about Fleda?"

"Yes."

"I have no idea they meant to trouble her—I suppose they did not at all know what they were doing,—thoughtless nonsense,—and they could have had no design to offend you. Promise me that you will not take any further notice of this!"

He shook off her beseeching hand as he rose up, and answered haughtily, and not without something like an oath, that he *would*.

Mrs. Carleton knew him better than to press the matter any further; and her fondness easily forgave the offence against herself, especially as her son almost immediately resumed his ordinary manner.

It had well nigh passed from the minds of both parties, when in the middle of the next day Mr. Carleton asked what had become of Fleda?—he had not seen her except at the breakfast table. Mrs. Carleton said she was not well.

"What's the matter?"

"She complained of some headache; I think she made herself sick yesterday; she was crying all the afternoon, and I could not get her to tell me what for. I tried every means I could think of, but she would not give me the least clue—she said 'no' to everything I guessed; I can't bear to see her do so—it makes it all the worse she does it so quietly—it was only by a mere chance I found she was crying at all, but I think she cried herself ill before she stopped. She could not eat a mouthful of breakfast."

Mr. Carleton said nothing, and with a changed countenance went directly down to the cabin. There he found his little charge, sitting bolt upright, her feet on the rung of a chair and her hands grasping the top to support herself. Her eyes were closed, her face without a particle of colour, except the

dark shade round the eyes which bespoke illness and pain. She made no attempt to answer his shocked questions and words of tender concern, not even by the raising of an eyelid, and he saw that the intensity of pain at the moment was such as to render breathing itself difficult. Most tenderly and judiciously he himself applied various remedies to the suffering child, who could not direct him otherwise than by gently putting away the things which she felt would not avail her. Several were in vain. But there was one bottle of strong aromatic vinegar which was destined to immortalise its owner in Fleda's remembrance. Before she had taken three whiffs of it her colour changed. Mr. Carleton watched the effect of a few whiffs more, and then bade the stewardess take away all the other things and bring him a cup of fresh strong coffee. By the time it came Fleda was ready for it, and by the time Mr. Carleton had administered the coffee he saw it would do to throw his mother's shawl round her and carry her up on deck, which he did without asking any questions. All this while Fleda had not spoken a word, except once when he asked her if she felt better. But she had given him, on finishing the coffee, a full look and half smile of such pure affectionate gratitude that the young gentleman's tongue was tied for some time after.

With happy skill, when he had safely bestowed Fleda among her cushions on deck, Mr. Carleton managed to keep off the crowd of busy inquirers after her well-doing, and even presently to turn his mother's attention another way, leaving Fleda to enjoy all the comfort of quiet and fresh air at once. He himself, seeming occupied with other things, did no more but keep watch over her, till he saw that she was able to bear conversation again. Then he seated himself beside her and said softly—

"Elfie, what were you crying about all yesterday afternoon?"

Fleda changed colour, for soft and gentle as the tone was, she heard in it a determination to have the answer; and looking up beseechingly into his face, she saw in the steady full blue eye that it was a determination she could not escape from.

"What was it, Elfie? You need not be afraid to tell me."

"It was only—what you said to Mrs. Carleton yesterday—when she was talking——"

"About my difficulty with those gentlemen?"

"Yes," said Fleda, with a new gush of tears, as if her grief stirred afresh at the thought.

Mr. Carleton was silent a moment, and when he spoke

there was no displeasure and more tenderness than usual in his voice.

"What troubled you in that, Elfie? Tell me the whole."

"I was sorry because—it wasn't right," said Fleda, with a grave truthfulness which yet lacked none of her universal gentleness and modesty.

"What wasn't right?"

"To speak—— I am afraid you won't like me to say it, Mr. Carleton."

"I will, Elfie, for I ask you."

"To speak to Mrs. Carleton so; and besides, you know what you said, Mr. Carleton——"

"It was *not* right," said he after a minute, "and I very seldom use such an expression; but you know one cannot always be on one's guard, Elfie?"

"But," said Fleda, with gentle persistence, "one can always do what is right."

"The deuce one can!" thought Mr. Carleton to himself. "Elfie, was this all that troubled you? that I had said what was not right?"

"It wasn't quite that only," said Fleda, hesitating.

"What else?"

She stooped her face from his sight, and he could but just understand her words.

"I was disappointed——"

"What, in me!"

Her tears gave the answer; she could add to them nothing but an assenting nod of her head.

They would have flowed in double measure if she had guessed the pain she had given. He paced up and down the deck, while Fleda wept more and more from the fear of having offended or grieved him. But she was soon reassured on the former point. She was just wiping away her tears, with the quiet expression of patience her face often wore, when Mr. Carleton sat down beside her, and took one of her hands.

"Elfie," said he, "I promise you I will never say such a thing again."

He might well call her his good angel, for it was an angelic look the child gave him. So purely humble, grateful, glad, so rosy with joyful hope; the eyes were absolutely sparkling through tears. But when she saw that his were not dry, her own overflowed. She clasped her other hand to his hand, and bending down her face affectionately upon it, she wept, if ever angels weep, such tears as they.

"Elfie," said Mr. Carleton, as soon as he could, "I want you to go downstairs with me; so dry those eyes, or my mother will be asking all sorts of difficult questions."

Happiness is a quick restorative. Elfie was soon ready to go where he would.

They found Mrs. Carleton fortunately wrapped up in a new novel, some distance apart from the other persons in the cabin. The novel was immediately laid aside to take Fleda on her lap and praise Guy's nursing.

"But she looks more like a wax figure yet than anything else, don't she, Guy?"

"Not like any that ever I saw," said Mr. Carleton gravely. "Hardly substantial enough. Mother, I have come to tell you I am ashamed of myself for having given you such cause of offence yesterday."

Mrs. Carleton's quick look, as she laid her hand on her son's arm, said sufficiently well that she would have excused him from making any apology rather than have him humble himself in the presence of a third person.

"Fleda heard me yesterday," said he; "it was right she should hear me to-day."

"Then, my dear Guy," said his mother, with a secret eagerness which she did not allow to appear, "if I may make a condition for my forgiveness, which you had before you asked for it, will you grant me one favour?"

"Certainly, mother, if I can."

"You promise me?"

"As well in one word as in two."

"Promise me that you will never, by any circumstances, allow yourself to be drawn into—what is called *an affair of honour*."

Mr. Carleton's brow changed, and without making any reply, perhaps to avoid his mother's questioning gaze, he rose up and walked two or three times the length of the cabin. His mother and Fleda watched him doubtfully.

"Do you see how you have got me into trouble, Elfie?" said he, stopping before them.

Fleda looked wonderingly, and Mrs. Carleton exclaimed, "What trouble?"

"Elfie," said he, without immediately answering his mother, "what would your conscience do with two promises, both which cannot be kept?"

"What such promises have you made?" said Mrs. Carleton eagerly.

"Let me hear first what Fleda says to my question."

"Why," said Fleda, looking a little bewildered, "I would keep the right one."

"Not the one first made?" said he, smiling.

"No," said Fleda, "not unless it was the right one."

"But don't you think one ought to keep one's word, in any event?"

"I don't think anything can make it right to do wrong," Fleda said gravely, and not without a secret trembling consciousness to what point she was speaking.

He left them, and again took several turns up and down the cabin before he sat down.

"You have not given me your promise yet, Guy," said his mother, whose eye had not once quitted him. "You said you would."

"I said, if I could."

"Well? you can."

"I have two honourable meetings of the proscribed kind now on hand, to which I stand pledged."

Fleda hid her face in an agony. Mrs. Carleton's agony was in every line of hers as she grasped her son's wrist, exclaiming, "Guy, promise me!" She had words for nothing else. He hesitated still a moment, and then meeting his mother's look, he said gravely and steadily—

"I promise you, mother, I never will."

His mother threw herself upon his breast, and hid her face there, too much excited to have any thought of her customary regard to appearances, sobbing out thanks and blessings even audibly. Fleda's gentle head was bowed in almost equal agitation, and Mr. Carleton at that moment had no doubt that he had chosen well which promise to keep.

There remained, however, a less agreeable part of the business to manage. After seeing his mother and Fleda quite happy again, though without satisfying in any degree the curiosity of the former, Guy went in search of the two young West Point officers. They were together, but without Thorn's friend, Capt. Beebee. Him Carleton next sought, and brought to the forward deck, where the others were enjoying their cigars.

"Gentlemen," Carleton began, "I gave you yesterday reason to expect that so soon as circumstances permitted, you should have the opportunity which offended honour desires of trying sounder arguments than those of reason upon the offender. I have to tell you to-day that I will not give it you. I have thought further of it."

"Is it a new insult that you mean by this, sir?" exclaimed Rossitur, in astonishment. Thorn's cigar did not stir.

"Neither new nor old. I mean simply that I have changed my mind."

"But this is very extraordinary," said Rossitur. "What reason do you give?"

"I give none, sir."

"In that case," said Capt. Beebee, "perhaps Mr. Carleton will not object to explain or unsay the things which gave offence yesterday."

"I apprehend there is nothing to explain, sir; I think I must have been understood; and I never take back my words, for I am in the habit of speaking the truth."

"Then we are to consider this as a further unprovoked, unmitigated insult for which you will give neither reason nor satisfaction!" cried Rossitur.

"I have already disclaimed that, Mr. Rossitur."

"Are we, on mature deliberation, considered unworthy of the *honour* you so condescendingly awarded to us yesterday?"

"My reasons have nothing to do with you, sir, nor with your friend; they are entirely personal to myself."

"Mr. Carleton must be aware," said Capt. Beebee, "that his conduct, if unexplained, will bear a very strange construction."

Mr. Carleton was coldly silent.

"It never was heard of," the captain went on, "that a gentleman declined both to explain and to give satisfaction for any part of his conduct which had called for it."

"It never was heard that a *gentleman* did," said Thorn, removing his cigar a moment for the purpose of supplying the emphasis which his friend had carefully omitted to make.

"Will you say, Mr. Carleton," said Rossitur, "that you did not mean to offend us yesterday in what you said?"

"No, Mr. Rossitur."

"You will not?" cried the captain.

"No, sir; for your friends had given me, as I conceived, just cause of displeasure; and I was, and am, careless of offending those who have done so."

"You consider yourself aggrieved, then, in the first place?" said Beebee.

"I have said so, sir."

"Then," said the captain, after a puzzled look out to sea, "supposing that my friends disclaim all intention to offend you, in that case——"

"In that case, I should be glad, Captain Beebee, that they had changed their line of tactics; there is nothing to change in my own."

"Then what are we to understand by this strange refusal of a meeting, Mr. Carleton—what does it mean?"

"It means one thing in my own mind, sir, and probably another in yours; but the outward expression I choose to give it is that I will not reward uncalled-for rudeness with an opportunity of self-vindication."

"You are," said Thorn sneeringly, "probably careless as to the figure your own name will cut in connection with this story?"

"Entirely so," said Mr. Carleton, eyeing him steadily.

"You are aware that your character is at our mercy?"

A slight bow seemed to leave at their disposal the very small portion of his character he conceived to lie in that predicament.

"You will expect to hear yourself spoken of in terms that befit a man who has cowed out of an engagement he dared not fulfil?"

"Of course," said Carleton haughtily, "by my present refusal I give you leave to say all that, and as much more as your ingenuity can furnish in the same style; but not in my hearing, sir."

"You can't help yourself," said Thorn, with the same sneer. "You have rid yourself of a gentleman's means of protection; what others will you use?"

"I will leave that to the suggestion of the moment. I do not doubt it will be found fruitful."

Nobody doubted it who looked just then on his steady sparkling eye.

He left the group with the same air of imperturbable self-possession which he had maintained during the conference. But presently Rossitur, who had his private reasons for wishing to keep friends with an acquaintance who might be of service in more ways than one, followed him and declared himself to have been, in all his nonsense to Fleda, most undesirous of giving displeasure to her temporary guardian, and sorry that it had fallen out so. He spoke frankly, and Mr. Carleton, with the same cool gracefulness with which he had carried on the quarrel, waived his displeasure, and admitted the young gentleman apparently to stand as before in his favour. Their reconciliation was not an hour old when Captain Beebee joined them.

"I am sorry I must trouble you with a word more on this

disagreeable subject, Mr. Carleton," he began, after a ceremonious salutation. "My friend, Lieutenant Thorn, considers himself greatly outraged by your determination not to meet him. He begs to ask, by me, whether it is your purpose to abide by it at all hazards."

"Yes, sir."

"There is some misunderstanding here, which I greatly regret. I hope you will see and excuse the disagreeable necessity I am under of delivering the rest of my friend's message."

"Say on, sir."

"Mr. Thorn declares that if you deny him the common courtesy which no gentleman refuses to another, he will proclaim your name with the most opprobrious adjuncts to all the world; and in place of his former regard he will hold you in the most unlimited contempt, which he will have no scruple about showing on all occasions."

Mr. Carleton coloured a little, but replied coolly—"I have not lived in Mr. Thorn's favour. As to the rest, I forgive him!—except indeed he provoke me to measures for which I never will forgive him."

"Measures!" said the captain.

"I hope not! for my own self-respect would be more grievously hurt than his. But there is an unruly spring somewhere about my composition that when it gets wound up is once in a while too much for me."

"But," said Rossitur, "pardon me,—have you no regard to the effect of his misrepresentations?"

"You are mistaken, Mr. Rossitur," said Carleton slightly; "this is but the blast of a bellows,—not the simoon."

"Then what answer shall I have the honour of carrying back to my friend?" said Captain Beebee, after a sort of astounded pause of a few minutes."

"None, of my sending, sir."

Captain Beebee touched his cap, and went back to Mr. Thorn, to whom he reported that the young Englishman was thoroughly impracticable, and that there was nothing to be gained by dealing with him; and the vexed conclusion of Thorn's own mind, in the end, was in favour of the wisdom of letting him alone.

In a very different mood, saddened and disgusted, Mr. Carleton shook himself free of Rossitur, and went and stood alone by the guards looking out upon the sea. He did not at all regret his promise to his mother, nor wish to take other

ground than he had taken. Both the theory and the practice of duelling he heartily despised, and he was not weak enough to fancy that he had brought any discredit upon either his sense or his honour by refusing to comply with an unwarrantable and barbarous custom. And he valued mankind too little to be at all concerned about their judgment in the matter.

The rest of the voyage was perfectly quiet.

CHAPTER XIII.

There the most daintie paradise on ground
Itselfe doth offer to his sober eye,—
——The painted flowres, the trees upshooting bye,
The dales for shade, the hills for breathing space,
The trembling groves, the christall running by;
And that, which all faire works doth most aggrace,
The art which all that wrought appeared in no place.
—*Faery Queene.*

They had taken ship for London, as Mr. and Mrs. Carleton wished to visit home for a day or two before going on to Paris. So leaving Charlton to carry news of them to the French capital, so soon as he could persuade himself to leave the English one, they, with little Fleda in company, posted down to Carleton, in ——shire.

Fleda thought Carleton was a very odd place; that is, the house, not the village, which went by the same name. If the manner of her two companions had not been such as to put her entirely at her ease, she would have felt strange and shy. As it was, she felt half afraid of losing herself in the house; to Fleda's unaccustomed eyes it was a labyrinth of halls and staircases, set with the most unaccountable number and variety of rooms, old and new, quaint and comfortable, gloomy and magnificent. To an older and nice-judging person these rooms would have given no slight indications of their

owner's mind; it had been at work on every corner of them. No particular fashion had been followed in anything, nor any model consulted but that which fancy had built to the mind's order. A most refined taste and curious fastidiousness had arranged and harmonised all the heterogeneous items; the mental hieroglyphics had been ordered by one to whom the reading of them was no mystery. Nothing struck a stranger, at first entering, except the very rich effect and faultless air of the whole, and perhaps the delicious facilities for every kind of intellectual cultivation which appeared on every hand, facilities which it must be allowed do seem in general *not* to facilitate the work they are meant to speed. In this case, however, it was different. The mind that wanted them had brought them together to satisfy its own craving.

Out of doors she found still more to delight her. She stood watching the rolling slopes of green turf, *so* soft and lovely, and the magnificent trees, that had kept their ground for ages and see generations rise and fall before their growing strength and grandeur. They were scattered here and there on the lawn, and further back stood on the heights and stretched along the ridges of the undulating ground, the outposts of a wood of the same growth still beyond them.

"How do you like it, Elfie?" Mr. Carleton asked her the evening of the first day, as he saw her for a length of time looking out gravely and intently from before the hall-door.

"I think it is beautiful!" said Fleda.

"I'll take you to ride to-morrow," said he, smiling.

And not a day passed during their short stay that he did not give her one of those rides. She enjoyed it to the full during the few days she was there.

The short journey to Paris was soon made. The next morning Mrs. Carleton making an excuse of her fatigue left Guy to end the care he had rather taken upon himself by delivering his little charge into the hands of her friends. So they drove to the Hotel ——, Rue ——, where Mr. Rossitur had apartments in very handsome style. They found him alone in the saloon.

"Ha! Carleton, come back again. Just in time—very glad to see you. And who is this? Ah, another little daughter for Aunt Lucy."

Mr. Rossitur, who gave them this greeting very cordially, was rather a fine-looking man; decidedly agreeable both in person and manner. Fleda was pleasantly disappointed after what her grandfather had led her to expect. There might be

something of sternness in his expression; people gave him credit for a peremptory, not to say imperious temper; but if truly, it could not often meet with opposition. The sense and gentlemanly character which marked his face and bearing had an air of smooth politeness which seemed habitual. There was no want of kindness nor even of tenderness in the way he drew Fleda within his arm and held her there, while he went on talking to Mr. Carleton; now and then stooping his face to look in at her bonnet and kiss her, which was his only welcome. He said nothing to her after his first question.

He was too busy talking to Guy. But meanwhile where was Aunt Lucy? and had Mr. Rossitur forgotten the little armful that he held so fast and so perseveringly? No, for here was another kiss, and another look into her face, so kind that Fleda gave him a piece of her heart from that time.

"Hugh!" said Mr. Rossitur suddenly to somebody she had not seen before—"Hugh! here is your little cousin. Take her off to your mother."

A child came forward at this bidding hardly larger than herself. He was a slender graceful little figure, with nothing of the boy in his face or manner; delicate as a girl, and with something almost melancholy in the gentle sweetness of his countenance. Fleda's confidence was given to it on the instant which had not been the case with anything in her uncle, and she yielded without reluctance the hand he took to obey his father's command. Before two steps had been taken, however, she suddenly broke away from him, and springing to Mr. Carleton's side silently laid her hand in his. She made no answer whatever to a light word or two of kindness that he spoke just for her ear. She listened with downcast eyes and a lip that he saw was too unsteady to be trusted, and then after a moment more, without looking, pulled away her hand and followed her cousin. Hugh did not once get a sight of her face on the way to his mother's room, but owing to her exceeding efforts and quiet generalship he never guessed the cause. There was nothing in her face to raise suspicion when he reached the door and opening it announced her with—

"Mother, here's Cousin Fleda come."

Fleda had seen her aunt before, though several years back, and not long enough to get acquainted with her. But no matter; it was her mother's sister sitting there, whose face gave her so lovely a welcome at that speech of Hugh's, whose arms were stretched out so eagerly towards her; and springing to them as to a very haven of rest, Fleda wept on her bosom

those delicious tears that are only shed where the heart is at home. And even before they were dried the ties were knit that bound her to her new sphere.

Mr. Rossitur was a man of cultivated mind and very refined and fastidious taste. He lived for the pleasures of art and literature and the society where these are valued. For this, and not without some secret love of display, he lived in Paris; not extravagant in his pleasures, nor silly in his ostentation, but leading, like a gentleman, as worthy and rational a life as a man can lead who lives only to himself, with no further thought than to enjoy the passing hours. Mr. Rossitur enjoyed them elegantly, and for a man of the world, moderately bestowing however few of those precious hours upon his children. It was his maxim that they should be kept out of the way whenever their presence might by any chance interfere with the amusements of their elders; and this maxim, a good one certainly in some hands, was in his reading of it a very broad one. Still when he did take time to give his family he was a delightful companion to those of them who could understand him.

Fleda's life became very happy. It was easy to make her happy; affection and sympathy would have done it almost anywhere; but in Paris she had much more; and after time had softened the sorrow she brought with her, no bird ever found existence less of a burden, nor sang more lightheartedly along its life. In her aunt she had all but the name of a mother; in her uncle, with kindness and affection, she had amusement, interest, and improvement; in Hugh everything; love, confidence, sympathy, society, help; their tastes, opinions, pursuits, went hand in hand. The two children were always together. Fleda's spirits were brighter than Hugh's, and her intellectual tastes stronger and more universal. That might be as much from difference of physical as of mental constitution. Hugh's temperament led him somewhat to melancholy, and to those studies and pleasures which best side with subdued feeling and delicate nerves. Fleda's nervous system was of the finest too, but—in short, she was as like a bird as possible.

CHAPTER XIV.

Heav'n bless thee ;
Thou hast the sweetest face I ever look'd on.—*Shakespeare.*

ONE of the greatest of Fleda's pleasures was when Mr. Carleton came to take her out with him. He did that often. Fleda only wished he would have taken Hugh too, but somehow he never did.

It was strange that a young man, an admired man of fashion, a flattered favourite of the gay and great world, and furthermore a reserved and proud repeller of almost all who sought his intimacy, should seek and delight in the society of a little child. His mother would have wondered if she had known it. Mrs. Rossitur did marvel that even Fleda should have so won upon the cold and haughty young Englishman ; and her husband said he probably chose to have Fleda with him because he could make up his mind to like nobody else. A remark which, perhaps, arose from the utter failure of every attempt to draw him and Carleton nearer together. But Mr. Rossitur was only half right. The reason lay deeper.

Mr. Carleton had admitted the truth of Christianity, upon what he considered sufficient grounds, and would now have steadily fought for it, as he would for anything else that he believed to be truth. But there he stopped. He had not discovered nor tried to discover whether the truth of Christianity imposed any obligation upon him. He had cast off his unbelief, and looked upon it now as a singular folly. But his belief was almost as vague and as fruitless as his infidelity had been. He was living his old life at Paris, with his old dissatisfaction, perhaps a trifle less bitter. He was seeking pleasure in whatever art, learning, literature, refinement, and luxury can do for a man who has them all at command ; but there was something within him that spurned this ignoble existence and called for higher aims and worthier exertion. When he turned from the gay and corrupt world in which he lived, where the changes were rung incessantly upon self-interest, falsehood, pride, and the various more or less refined forms of sensuality, and when he looked upon that pure bright little face, so free from selfishness, those clear eyes so innocent of evil, the peaceful brow under which a thought of double-dealing had never hid, Mr. Carleton felt himself in a healthier region.

One day, some months after they had been in Paris, they were sitting in the Place de la Concorde. Mr. Carleton had forgotten her for a while in his own thoughts, and then the sight of the little gloved hand upon his knee brought him back again.

"What are you musing about, Elfie, dear?" he said cheerfully, taking the hand in one of his.

Fleda gave a swift glance into his face, as if to see whether it would be safe for her to answer his question; a kind of exploring look, in which her eyes often acted as scouts for her tongue. Those she met pledged their faith for her security; yet Fleda's look went back to the square and then again to his face in silence.

"Why," said Elfie, "I was thinking how unhappy and bad people are, especially people here, I think; and how much must be done before they will all be brought right; and then I was thinking of the work Jesus gave his disciples to do. Hugh and I were talking about it this morning."

"What is the work he gave them to do?" said Mr. Carleton, more and more interested.

"Why," said Fleda, lifting her gentle, wistful eyes to his and then looking away, "to bring everybody to be good and happy."

"And how in the world are they to do that?" said Mr. Carleton, astonished to see his own problem quietly handled by this child.

"By telling them about Jesus Christ, and getting them to believe and love him," said Fleda, glancing at him again, "and living so beautifully that people cannot help believing them."

"That last is an important clause," said Mr. Carleton thoughtfully. "But suppose people will not hear when they are spoken to, Elfie?"

"Some will at any rate," said Fleda, "and by and by everybody will."

"How do you know?"

"Because the Bible says so."

"But if that be so, Elfie, God can make them all good without our help?"

"Yes, but I suppose He chooses to do it with our help, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, with equal naïveté and gravity.

"But is not this you speak of," said he, half smiling, "rather the business of clergymen? You have nothing to do with it?"

"No," said Fleda, "everybody has something to do with it;

the Bible says so ; ministers must do it in their way and other people in other ways ; everybody has his own work. Don't you remember the parable of the ten talents, Mr. Carleton ? "

Mr. Carleton was silent for a minute.

" I do not know the Bible quite as well as you do, Elfie," he said then, " nor as I ought to do."

Elfie's only answer was by a look somewhat like that he well remembered on shipboard he had thought was angel-like, —a look of gentle, sorrowful wistfulness which she did not venture to put into words. It had not for that the less power. But he did not choose to prolong the conversation. They rose up and began to walk homeward, Elfie thinking with all the warmth of her little heart that she wished very much Mr. Carleton knew the Bible better.

He brought Fleda to her own door and there was leaving her.

" Stop ! Oh, Mr. Carleton," cried Fleda, " come in just for one minute—I want to show you something."

He made no resistance to that. She led him to the saloon, where it happened that nobody was, and repeating, " One minute ! " rushed out of the room. In less than that time she came running back with a beautiful half-blown bud of a monthly rose in her hand, and in her face such a bloom of pleasure and eagerness as more than rivalled it. The rose was fairly eclipsed. She put the bud quietly, but with a most satisfied air of affection into Mr. Carleton's hand. It had come from a little tree which he had given her on one of their first visits to the Quai aux Fleurs.

" What is all this, Elfie ? " said he. " Have you been robbing your rose-tree ? "

" No," said Elfie, " there are plenty more buds ! Isn't it lovely ? This is the first one. They've been a great while coming out."

His eye went from the rose to her ; he thought the one was a mere emblem of the other. Fleda was usually very quiet in her demonstrations ; it was as if a little green bud had suddenly burst into a flush of loveliness ; and he saw, it was as plain as possible, that good-will to him had been the moving power. He was so much struck and moved that his thanks, though as usual perfect in their kind, were far shorter and graver than he would have given if he had felt less. He turned away from the house, his mind full of the bright, unsullied purity and single-hearted good-will that had looked out of that beaming little face ; he seemed to see them again

in the flower he held in his hand, and he saw nothing else as he went.

That particular rose was to Mr. Carleton's eye a most perfect emblem and representative of its little giver. He traced out the points of resemblance as he went along. The delicacy and character of refinement for which that kind of rose is remarkable above many of its more superb kindred; a refinement essential and unalterable by decay or otherwise, as true a characteristic of the child as of the flower; a delicacy that called for gentle handling and tender cherishing; the sweetness, rare indeed, but asserting itself as it were timidly, at least with equally rare modesty; the very style of the beauty, that with all its loveliness would not startle nor even catch the eye among its more showy neighbours; and the breath of purity that seemed to own no kindred with earth, nor liability to infection.

He reached his room, put the flower in a glass on the table, and walked up and down before it. It had come to a struggle between the sense of what was and the passionate wish for what might have been.

"It is late, sir," said his servant, opening the door, "and you were——"

"I am not going out."

"This evening, sir?"

"No, not at all to-day. Spenser! I don't wish to see anybody—let no one come near me."

The servant retired, and Guy went on with his walk and his meditations; looking back over his life and reviewing, with a wiser ken now, the steps by which he had come. He compared the selfish disgust with which he had cast off the world with the very different spirit of little Fleda's look upon it that morning; the useless, self-pleasing, vain life he was leading, with her wish to be like the beloved disciple and do something to heal the troubles of those less happy than herself. He did not very well comprehend the grounds of her feeling or reasoning, but he began to see, mistily, that his own had been mistaken and wild.

His step grew slower, his eye more intent, his brow quiet.

"She is right and I am wrong," he thought. "She is by far the nobler creature—worth many such as I. *Like her* I cannot be—I cannot regain what I have lost—I cannot undo what years have done. But I can be something other than I am! If there be a system of remedy, as there well may, it may as well take effect on myself first. She says everybody

has his work; I believe her. I will make it my business to find out what mine is; and when I have made that sure I will give myself to the doing of it. An All-wise Governor must look for service of me. He shall have it. Whatever my life be, it shall be to some end."

Mr. Carleton walked his room for three hours; then rung for his servant and ordered him to prepare everything for leaving Paris the second day thereafter.

The next morning over their coffee he told his mother of his purpose.

"Leave Paris! To-morrow! My dear Guy, that is rather a sudden notice."

"No, mother, for I am going alone."

His mother immediately bent an anxious and somewhat terrified look upon him. The frank smile she met put half her suspicions out of her head at once. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all—if by 'matter' you mean mischief."

"You are not in difficulty with those young men again?"

"No, mother," said he coolly. "I am in difficulty with no one but myself."

"With yourself! But why will you not let me go with you?"

"My business will go on better if I am quite alone."

"What business?"

"Only to settle this question with myself," said he, smiling.

"But, Guy! you are enigmatical this morning. Is it the question that of all others I wish to see settled?"

"No, mother," said he, laughing, and colouring a little. "I don't want another half to take care of till I have this one under management."

"I don't understand you," said Mrs. Carleton. "There is no hidden reason under all this that you are keeping from me?"

"I won't say that. But there is none that need give you the least uneasiness. There are one or two matters I want to study out—I cannot do it here, so I am going where I shall be free."

"Where?"

"I think I shall pass the summer between Switzerland and Germany."

"And when and where shall I meet you again?"

"I think at home; I cannot say when."

"At home!" said his mother, with a brightening face. "Then you are beginning to be tired of wandering at last?"

"Not precisely, mother, rather out of humour."

"I shall be glad of anything," said his mother, gazing at him admiringly, "that brings you home again, Guy."

"Bring me home a better man, I hope, mother," said he, kissing her as he left the room. "I will see you again by and by."

"'A better man!'" thought Mrs. Carleton, as she sat with full eyes, the image of her son filling the place where his presence had been. "I would be willing never to see him better and be sure of his never being worse!"

Mr. Carleton's farewell visit found Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur not at home. They had driven out early into the country to fetch Marion from her convent for some holiday. Fleda came alone into the saloon to receive him.

"I have your rose in safe keeping, Elfie," he said. "It has done me more good than ever a rose did before."

Fleda smiled an innocently pleased smile. But her look changed when he added—

"I have come to tell you so, and to bid you good-bye."

"Are you going away, Mr. Carleton?"

"Yes."

"But you will be back soon?"

"No, Elfie, I do not know that I shall ever come back."

He spoke gravely, more gravely than he was used; and Fleda's acuteness saw that there was some solid reason for this sudden determination. Her face changed sadly but she was silent, her eyes never wavering from those that read hers with such gentle intelligence.

"You will be satisfied to have me go, Elfie, when I tell you that I am going on business which I believe to be duty. Nothing else takes me away. I am going to try to do right, Elfie," said he, smiling.

"I shall miss my good fairy," Mr. Carleton went on lightly; "I don't know how I shall do without her. If your wand was long enough to reach so far, I would ask you to touch me now and then, Elfie."

Poor Elfie could not stand that. Her head sank. She knew she had a wand that could touch him, and well and gratefully she resolved that its light blessing should "now and then" rest on his head; but he did not understand that; he was talking, whether lightly or seriously, and Elfie knew it was a little of both—he was talking of wanting her help, and was ignorant of the help that alone could avail him. "Oh, that he knew but that!" What with this feeling and sorrow together the child's distress was exceeding great;

and the tokens of grief in one so accustomed to hide them were the more painful to see. Mr. Carleton drew the sorrowing little creature within his arm and endeavoured with a mixture of kindness and lightness in his tone to cheer her.

"I shall often remember you, dear Elfie," he said; "I shall keep your rose always and take it with me wherever I go. You must not make it too hard for me to quit Paris—you are glad to have me go on such an errand, are you not?"

She presently commanded herself, bade her tears wait till another time, as usual, and trying to get rid of those that covered her face, asked him, "What errand?"

He hesitated.

"I have been thinking of what we were talking of yesterday, Elfie," he said at length. "I am going to try to discover my duty, and then to do it."

But Fleda at that clasped his hand, and squeezing it in both hers bent down her little head over it to hide her face and the tears that streamed again.

"There is nobody else in Paris that will be so sorry for my leaving it," said Mr. Carleton, half tenderly and half pleasantly.

"There is nobody else that has so much cause," said Elfie, near bursting out again, but she restrained herself.

"And you will not come here again, Mr. Carleton?" she said after a few minutes.

"I do not say that—it is possible—if I do, it will be to see you, Elfie."

A shadow of a smile passed over her face at that. It was gone instantly.

"My mother will not leave Paris yet," he went on; "you will see her often."

But he saw that Fleda was thinking of something else; she scarce seemed to hear him. She was thinking of something that troubled her.

"Mr. Carleton," she began, and her colour changed.

"Speak, Elfie."

Her colour changed again. "Mr. Carleton, will you be displeased if I say something?"

"Don't you know me better than to ask me that, Elfie?" he said gently.

"Will you wait for me one moment, Mr. Carleton?"

"Half an hour."

She sprang away, her face absolutely flashing pleasure through her tears. It was much soberer, and again doubtful and changing colour; when a few minutes afterwards she came

back with a book in her hand. With a striking mixture of timidity, modesty, and eagerness in her countenance she came forward, and putting the little volume, which was her own Bible, into Mr. Carleton's hands, said under her breath, "Please read it." She did not venture to look up.

He saw what the book was; and then taking the gentle hand which had given it, he kissed it two or three times. If it had been a princess's he could not with more respect.

"You have my promise, Elfie," he said. "I need not repeat it?"

She raised her eyes and gave him a look so grateful, so loving, so happy, that it dwelt for ever in his remembrance. A moment after it had faded, and she stood still where he had left her, listening to his footsteps as they went down the stairs. She heard the last of them, and then sank upon her knees by a chair and burst into a passion of tears. It was not only the losing a loved and pleasant friend, it was not only the stirring of sudden and disagreeable excitement—poor Elfie was crying for her Bible. It had been her father's own—it was filled with his marks—it was precious to her above price—and Elfie cried with all her heart for the loss of it. She had done what she had on the spur of the emergency—she was satisfied she had done right; she would not take it back if she could; but not the less her Bible was gone.

Hours had passed, and the tears were dried, and the little face was bending over the wonted tasks with a shadow upon its wonted cheerfulness, when Rosaline came to tell her that Victor said there was somebody in the passage who wanted to see her and would not come in.

It was Mr. Carleton himself. He gave her a parcel, smiled at her without saying a word, kissed her hand earnestly, and was gone again. Fleda ran to her own room, and took the wrappers off such a beauty of a Bible as she had never seen; bound in blue velvet, with clasps of gold and her initials in letters of gold upon the cover. Fleda hardly knew whether to be most pleased or sorry; for to have its place so supplied seemed to put her lost treasure further away than ever. The result was another flood of very tender tears; in the very shedding of which, however, the new little Bible was bound to her heart with cords of association as bright and as incorruptible as its gold mountings.

CHAPTER XV.

Her sports were such as carried riches of knowledge upon the stream of delight.—*Sidney.*

FLEDA had not been a year in Paris when her uncle suddenly made up his mind to quit it and go home. Some trouble in money affairs, felt or feared, brought him to this step, which a month before he had no definite purpose of ever taking. There was cloudy weather in the financial world of New York, and he wisely judged it best that his own eyes should be on the spot to see to his own interests. Nobody was sorry for this determination. Mrs. Rossitur always liked what her husband liked, but she had at the same time a decided predilection for home. Marion was glad to leave her convent for the gay world, which her parents promised she should immediately enter. And Hugh and Fleda had too lively a spring of happiness within themselves to care where its outgoings should be.

So home they came, in good mood, bringing with them all manner of Parisian delights that Paris could part with. Hugh brought home a treasure of books and a flute, to which he was devoted. Fleda's special joy was a beautiful little King Charles, which had been sent her by Mr. Carleton a few weeks before. It came with the kindest of letters, saying that some matters had made it inexpedient for him to pass through Paris on his way home, but that he hoped nevertheless to see her soon. That intimation was the only thing that made Fleda sorry to leave Paris.

The life she and Hugh led was little changed by the change of place. They went out and came in as they had done in Paris, and took the same quiet but intense happiness in the same quiet occupations and pleasures.

They were left, those two children, quite as much to themselves as ever. Marion was going into company, and she and her mother were swallowed up in the consequent necessary calls upon their time. Marion never had been anything to Fleda. She was a fine handsome girl, outwardly, but seemed to have more of her father than her mother in her composition, though colder natured and more wrapped up in self than Mr. Rossitur would be called by anybody that knew him. She had never done anything to draw Fleda towards her, and

even Hugh has very little of her attention. They did not miss it. They were everything to each other.

Everything—for now morning and night there was a sort of whirlwind in the house which carried the mother and daughter round and round and permitted no rest; and Mr. Rossitur himself was drawn in. It was worse than it had been in Paris. There, with Marion in her convent, there were often evenings when they did not go abroad nor receive company, and spent the time quietly and happily in each other's society. No such evenings now; if by chance there were an unoccupied one Mrs. Rossitur and her daughter were sure to be tired and Mr. Rossitur busy.

It was a somewhat irregular and desultory education that the two children gathered. The masters they had were rather for accomplishments and languages than for anything solid; the rest they worked out for themselves. Fortunately, they both loved books, and rational books; and hours and hours, when Mrs. Rossitur and her daughter were paying or receiving visits, they, always together, were stowed away behind the book-cases or in the library window poring patiently over pages of various complexion; the soft turning of the leaves or Fleda's frequent attentions to King the only sound in the room. They walked together, talking of what they had read, though indeed they ranged beyond that into nameless and numberless fields of speculation, where if they sometimes found fruit, they as often lost their way. However, the habit of ranging was something.

For Fleda this doubtful course of mental training wrought singularly well. An uncommonly quick eye and strong memory and clear head, which she had even in childhood, passed over no field of truth or fancy without making their quiet gleanings; and the stores thus gathered, though somewhat miscellaneous and unarranged, were both rich and uncommon, and more than any one or she herself knew. Perhaps such a mind thus left to itself knew a more free and luxuriant growth than could ever have flourished within the confinement of rules. Cherished as little Fleda dearly was, her mind kept company with no one but herself,—and Hugh. As to externals —music was uncommonly loved by both the children, and by both cultivated with great success. So much came under Mrs. Rossitur's knowledge. Also every foreign Signor and Madame that came into the house to teach them spoke with enthusiasm of the apt minds and flexile tongues that honoured their instructions. Hugh's intellectual tastes were not so strong

as Fleda's; his reading was more superficial; his gleanings not so sound and in far fewer fields, and they went rather to nourish sentiment and fancy than to stimulate thought or lay up food for it. But his parents saw nothing of this.

The third winter had not passed, when Fleda's discernment saw that Mr. Sweden, as she called him, a German gentleman, would not cease coming to the house till he had carried off Marion with him. Her opinion on the subject was delivered to no one but Hugh.

Mr. Schwiden carried off Marion before the end of spring; and after she was gone something like the old pleasant Paris life was taken up again. They had no more company now than was agreeable, and it was picked, not to suit Marion's taste, but her father's—a very different matter. Fleda and Hugh were not forbidden the dinner-table, and so had the good of hearing much useful conversation, from which the former, according to custom, made her steady precious gleanings. The pleasant evenings in the family were still better enjoyed than they used to be. Fleda was older; and the snug handsome American house had a home-feeling to her that the wide Parisian saloons never knew. She had become bound to her uncle and aunt by all but the ties of blood; nobody in the house ever remembered that she was not born their daughter; except indeed Fleda herself, who remembered everything, and with whom the forming of any new affections or relations somehow never blotted out or even faded the register of the old. It lived in all its brightness; the writing of past loves and friendships was as plain as ever in her heart; and often, often the eye and the kiss of memory fell upon it. In the secret of her heart's core; for still, as at the first, no one had a suspicion of the movings of thought that were beneath that childish brow. No one guessed how clear a judgment weighed and decided upon many things. No one dreamed amid their busy, bustling, thoughtless life, how often in the street, in her bed, in company, and alone, her mother's last prayer was in Fleda's heart; well cherished; never forgotten.

CHAPTER XVI.

Whereunto is money good ?
Who has it not wants hardihood,
Who has it has much trouble and care,
Who once has had it has despair.
Longfellow.—(From the German.)

It was the middle of winter. One day Hugh and Fleda had come home from their walk. They dashed into the parlour, complaining that it was bitterly cold, and began unrobing before the glowing grate, which was a mass of living fire from end to end. Mrs. Rossitur was there in an easy chair, alone and doing nothing. That was not a thing absolutely unheard of, but Fleda had not pulled off her second glove before she bent down towards her and in a changed tone tenderly asked her if she did not feel well ?

Mrs. Rossitur looked up in her face a minute, and then drawing her down kissed the blooming cheeks one and the other several times. But as she looked off to the fire again Fleda saw that it was through watery eyes. She dropped on her knees by the side of the easy chair that she might have a better sight of that face, and tried to read it as she asked again what was the matter ; and Hugh coming to the other side repeated her question. His mother passed an arm round each, looking wistfully from one to the other and kissing them earnestly, but she said only, with a very heart-felt emphasis, " Poor children ! "

Fleda was now afraid to speak, but Hugh pressed his inquiry.

" Why poor, mamma ? " What makes you say so ? "

" Because you are poor really, dear Hugh. We have lost everything we have in the world."

" Mamma ! What do you mean ? "

" Your father has failed."

" Failed ! But, mamma, I thought he wasn't in business ? "

" So I thought," said Mrs. Rossitur ; " I didn't know people could fail that were not in business ; but it seems they can. He was a partner in some concern or other, and it's all broken to pieces, and your father with it, he says."

Mrs. Rossitur's face was distressful. They were all silent for a little ; Hugh kissing his mother's wet cheeks. Fleda had softly nestled her head in her bosom. But Mrs. Rossitur soon recovered herself.

"How bad is it, mother?" said Hugh.

"As bad as can possibly be."

"Is *everything* gone?"

"Everything!"

"Then what are we going to do?"

Mrs. Rossitur shook her head, and had no words.

Fleda *looked* across to Hugh to ask no more, and putting her arms round her aunt's neck and laying cheek to cheek, she spoke what comfort she could.

"Don't dear aunt Lucy! there will be some way, things always turn out better than at first. I dare say we shall find out it isn't so bad by and by. Don't you mind it, and then we won't. We can be happy anywhere together."

If there was not much in the reasoning there was something in the tone of the words to bid Mrs. Rossitur bear herself well.

Fleda,with a sweetness and gentleness like nothing but the breath of the south wind, wooed her aunt to hope and resignation. Hugh held back, feeling, or thinking, that Fleda could do it better than he, and watching her progress, as Mrs. Rossitur took her hand from her face, and smiled, at first mournfully and then really mirthfully in Fleda's face, at some sally that nobody but a nice observer would have seen was got up for the occasion. And it was hardly that, so completely had the child forgotten her own sorrow in ministering to that of another.

"You are a witch or a fairy," said Mrs. Rossitur, catching her again in her arms, "nothing else! You must try your powers of charming upon your uncle."

Fleda laughed, without any effort; but as to trying her slight wand upon Mr. Rossitur she had serious doubts. And the doubts became certainty when they met at dinner; he looked so grave that she dared not attack him. It was a gloomy meal, for the face that should have lighted the whole table cast a shadow there.

Without at all comprehending the whole of her husband's character, the sure magnetism of affection had enabled Mrs. Rossitur to divine his thoughts. Pride was his ruling passion; not such pride as Mr. Carleton's, which was rather like exaggerated self-respect, but wider and more indiscriminate in its choice of objects. It was pride in his family name; pride in his own talents, which were considerable; pride in his family, wife and children and all of which he thought did him honour,—if they had not his love for them assuredly would have known some diminishing; pride in his wealth,

and in the attractions with which it surrounded him; and, lastly, pride in the skill, taste, and connoisseurship which enabled him to bring those attractions together. Furthermore, his love for both literature and art was true and strong; and for many years he had accustomed himself to lead a life of great luxuriousness; catering for body and mind in every taste that could be elegantly enjoyed; and again proud of the elegance of every enjoyment. The change of circumstances which touched his pride wounded him at every point where he was vulnerable at all.

Fleda had never felt so afraid of him. She was glad to see Dr. Gregory—an uncle of Mrs. Rossitur's, a kind, elderly gentleman with a roughness in his manners—come in to tea. Mr. Rossitur was not there. The Doctor did not touch upon affairs, if he had heard of their misfortune; he went on as usual in a rambling cheerful way all tea-time, talking mostly to Fleda and Hugh. But after tea he talked no more, but sat still and waited till the master of the house came in.

Fleda thought Mr. Rossitur did not look glad to see him. But how could he look glad about anything? He did not sit down, and for a few minutes there was a kind of meaning silence. Fleda sat in the corner with the heartache, to see her uncle's gloomy tramp up and down the rich apartment, and her aunt Lucy's gaze at him.

"Humph! well! So," said the doctor at last, "you've all gone overboard with a smash, I understand?"

The walker gave him no regard.

"True, is it?" said the doctor.

Mr. Rossitur made no answer, unless a smothered grunt might be taken for one.

"How came it about?"

"Folly and devilry."

"Humph! Bad capital to work upon. I hope the principal is gone with the interest. What's the amount of your loss?"

"Ruin."

"Humph. French ruin, or American ruin? because there's a difference. What do you mean?"

"I am not so happy as to understand you, sir, but we shall not pay seventy cents. on the dollar."

The old gentleman got up and stood before the fire with his back to Mr. Rossitur, saying "that was rather bad."

"What are you going to do."

Mr. Rossitur hesitated a few moments for an answer and then said—

"Pay the seventy cents and begin the world anew with nothing."

"Of course!" said the doctor. "I understand that; but where and how? What end of the world will you take up first?"

Mr. Rossitur writhed in impatience or disgust, and after again hesitating answered dryly, that he had not determined.

"Have you thought of anything in particular?"

"Zounds! no, sir, except my misfortune. That's enough for one day."

"And too much," said the old doctor, "unless you can mix some other thought with it. That's what I came for. Will you go into business?"

Fleda was startled by the vehemence with which her uncle said, "No, never!" and he presently added, "I'll do nothing here.'

"Well, well," said the doctor to himself; "will you go into the country?"

"Yes! anywhere! the further the better."

Mrs. Rossitur startled, but her husband's face did not encourage her to open her lips.

"Ay, but on a farm, I mean?"

"On anything that will give me a standing."

"I thought that too," said Dr. Gregory, now whirling about. "I have a fine piece of land that wants a tenant. You may take it at an easy rate, and pay me when the crops come in. I shouldn't expect so young a farmer, you know, to keep any closer terms."

"How far is it?"

"Far enough—up in Wyandot County."

"How large?"

"A matter of two or three hundred acres or so. It came into a fellow's hands that owed me what I thought was a bad debt; so, for fear he would never pay me, I thought best to take it and pay him. Whether the place will ever fill my pockets again remains to be seen; doubtful, I think."

"I'll take it, Dr. Gregory, and see if I cannot bring that about."

"Poor, pooh! fill your own. I am not careful about it. The less money one has the more it jingles, unless it gets *too* low indeed."

"I will take it, Dr. Gregory, and feel myself under obligation to you."

"No, I told you, not till the crops come in. No obligation is binding till the term is up. Well, I'll see you further about it."

"By the way, Rolf," he proceeded, "there is a fine water power up yonder, and a saw-mill in good order, they tell me, but a short way from the house. Hugh might learn to manage it, and it would be fine employment for him."

Fleda sprang forward.

"A saw-mill!—Uncle Orrin!—where is it?"

"Just a little way from the house, they say. *You* can't manage it, fair Saxon! though you look as if you would undertake all the mills in creation, for a trifle."

"No, but the place, Uncle Orrin; where is the place?"

"The place? Hum—why, it's up in Wyandot County—some five or six miles from the Montepoole Spring—what's this they call it?—Queechy!—By the way!" said he, reading Fleda's countenance, "it is the very place where your father was born!—it is! I didn't think of that before."

Fleda's hands were clasped.

"Oh, I am very glad!" she said. "It's my old home. It is the most lovely place, Aunt Lucy!—most lovely—and we shall have some good neighbours there too. Oh, I am very glad. The dear old saw-mill!——"

"Dear old saw-mill!" said the doctor, looking at her. "Rolf, I'll tell you what, you shall give me this girl. I want her. I can take better care of her, perhaps, now than you can. Let her come to me when you leave the city—it will be better for her than to help work the saw-mill; and I have as good a right to her as anybody, for Amy before her was like my own child."

The doctor spoke not with his usual light jesting manner, but very seriously. Hugh's lips parted,—Mrs. Rossitur looked with a sad thoughtful look at Fleda,—Mr. Rossitur walked up and down looking at nobody. Fleda watched him.

"What does Fleda herself say?" said he, stopping short suddenly. His face softened and his eye changed as it fell upon her, for the first time that day. Fleda saw her opening; she came to him, within his arms, and laid her head upon his breast.

"What does Fleda say?" said he, softly kissing her.

Fleda's tears said a good deal, that needed no interpreter. She felt her uncle's hand passed more and more tenderly over

her head, so tenderly that it made it all the more difficult for her to govern herself and stop her tears. But she did stop them, and looked up at him then with such a face—so glowing through smiles and tears—it was like a very rainbow of hope upon the cloud of their prospects. Mr. Rossitur felt the power of the sunbeam wand, it reached his heart; it was even with a smile that he said as he looked at her—

"Will you go to your Uncle Orrin, Fleda?"

"Not if Uncle Rolf will keep me."

"Keep you!" said Mr. Rossitur; "I should like to see who wouldn't keep you? There, Dr. Gregory, you have your answer."

"Hum!—I might have known," said the doctor, "that the 'faire Una' would abjure cities. Come here, you Elf!" and he wrapped her in his arms so tight she could not stir,—"I have a spite against you for this. What amends will you make me for such an affront?"

"Let me take breath," said Fleda, laughing, "and I'll tell you. You don't want any amends, Uncle Orrin."

"Well," said he, gazing with more feeling than he cared to show into that sweet face, so innocent of apology-making, "you shall promise me that you will not forget Uncle Orrin and the old house in Bleecker Street."

Fleda's eyes grew more wistful.

"And will you promise me that if ever you want anything you will come or send straight here?"

"If ever I want anything I can't get nor do without," said Fleda.

"Pshaw!" said the doctor, letting her go, but laughing at the same time. "Mind my words, Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur; if ever that girl takes the wrong bit in her mouth—well, well! I'll go home."

Home he went. The rest drew together particularly near, round the fire; Hugh at his father's shoulder, and Fleda kneeling on the rug between her uncle and aunt with a hand on each; and there was not one of them whose gloom was not lightened by her bright face and cheerful words of hope that in the new scenes they were going to "they would all be so happy."

The creditors would touch none of Mrs. Rossitur's things, her husband's honourable behaviour had been so thorough. They even presented him with one or two pictures which he sold for a considerable sum; and to Mrs. Rossitur they gave up all the plate in daily use; a matter of great rejoicing to

Fleda, who knew well how sorely it would have been missed. She and her aunt had quite a little library too, of their own private store; a little one it was indeed, but the worth of every volume was now trebled in her eyes. Their furniture was all left behind; and in its stead went some of neat light painted wood which looked to Fleda deliciously countryfied. A promising cook and housemaid were engaged to go with them to the wilds; and about the first of April they turned their backs upon the city.

CHAPTER XVII.

The thresher's weary flingin-tree
The lee-lang day had tired me:
And whan the day had closed his e'e,
Far i' the west,
Ben i' the spence, right pensivelie,
I 'gaed to rest.—*Burns.*

QUEECHY was reached at night. Fleda had promised herself to be off almost with the dawn of light the next morning to see aunt Miriam, but a heavy rain kept her fast at home the whole day. It was very well; she was wanted there.

Despite the rain and her disappointment it was impossible for Fleda to lie abed from the time the first grey light began to break in at her windows, those old windows that had rattled their welcome to her all night. She was up and dressed before anybody else had thought of leaving the indubitable comfort of a feather bed for the doubtful contingency of happiness that awaited them downstairs.

Fleda did not stand still to think. She had gone softly all over the house, taking a strange look at the old places and the images with which memory filled them, thinking of the last time, and many a time before that; and she had at last come back to the sitting-room, long before anybody else was

downstairs; the two tired servants were just rubbing their eyes open in the kitchen and speculating themselves awake. Leaving them, Fleda set about trying what her wand could do towards brightening the face of affairs in the other part of the house. She busied herself with the various stray packages and articles of wearing apparel that lay scattered about, giving the whole place a look of discomfort. Fleda gathered them up and bestowed them in one or two of the impertinent cupboards, and then undertook the labour of carrying out all the wrong furniture that had got into the breakfast room and bringing in that which really belonged there from the hall and the parlour beyond; moving like a mouse that she might not disturb the people upstairs. One other thing remained —setting the breakfast table; and Fleda would let no hands but hers do it this morning; she was curious about the setting of tables. How she remembered or divined where everything had been stowed; how quietly and efficiently her little fingers unfastened hampers and pried into baskets, without making any noise; till all the breakfast paraphernalia of silver, china, and table-linen was found, gathered from various receptacles, and laid in most exquisite order on the table. Fleda stood and looked at it then, in immense satisfaction, seeing that her uncle's eye would miss nothing of its accustomed gratification.

Nobody found out how busy Fleda's wand had been in the old breakfast-room. She enjoyed her breakfast, the only one of the party that did. Mr. Rossitur looked moody; his wife looked anxious; and Hugh's face was the reflection of theirs. If Fleda's face reflected anything it was the sunlight of heaven.

"How sweet the air is after New York!" said she.

They looked at her. There was a fresh sweetness of another kind about that breakfast-table. They all felt it and breathed more freely.

"Delicious cresses?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Yes, I wonder where they came from," said her husband. "Who got them?"

"I guess Fleda knows," said Hugh.

"They grow in a little stream of spring water over here in the meadow," said Fleda demurely.

"Yes, but you don't answer my question," said her uncle, putting his hand under her chin and smiling at the blushing face he brought round to view, "Who got them?"

"I did."

"You have been out in the rain?"

"Oh, Queechy rain don't hurt me, Uncle Rolf."

"And don't it wet you either?"

"Yes, sir, a little."

"How much?"

"My sleeves—oh, I dried them long ago."

"Don't you repeat that experiment, Fleda," said he seriously, but with a look that was a good reward to her, nevertheless.

Fleda was as busy as a bee the whole day. What she had done in the breakfast-room she did or helped to do in the other parts of the house; she unpacked boxes and put away clothes and linen, in which Hugh was her excellent helper; she arranged her uncle's dressing-table with a scrupulosity that left nothing uncared-for; and the last thing before tea she and Hugh dived into the book-box to get out some favourite volumes to lay upon the table in the evening, that the room might not look to her uncle quite so dismally bare. He had been abroad notwithstanding the rain near the whole day.

It was a weary party that gathered round the supper-table that night, weary it seemed as much in mind as in body; and the meal exerted its cheering influence over only two of them; Mr. and Mrs. Rossitur sipped their cups of tea abstractedly.

"I don't believe that fellow Donohan knows much about his business," remarked the former at length.

"Why don't you get somebody else then?" said his wife.

"I happen to have engaged him, unfortunately."

"What will you do?" said Mrs. Rossitur, after a moment.

A question men are not fond of answering, especially when they have not made up their minds. Mr. Rossitur was silent, and his wife too, after that.

"If you want one and don't know of one, Uncle Rolf," said Fleda, "I dare say cousin Seth might."

That gentle modest speech brought his attention round upon her. His face softened.

"Cousin Seth? who is cousin Seth?"

"He is aunt Miriam's son," said Fleda. "Seth Plumfield. He's a very good farmer, I know; grandpa used to say he was; and he knows everybody."

"Mrs. Plumfield," said Mrs. Rossitur, as her husband's eyes went inquiringly to her,—"Mrs. Plumfield was Mr. Ringgan's sister, you remember. This is her son."

"Cousin Seth, eh?" said Mr. Rossitur dubiously. "Well—why, Fleda, your sweet air don't seem to agree with you, as

far as I see ; I have not known you look so—so *triste*—since we left Paris. What have you been doing, my child ? "

" She has been doing everything, father," said Hugh.

" Oh, it's nothing," said Fleda, answering Mr. Rossitur's look and tone of affection with a bright smile. " I'm a little tired, that's all."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Gon. Here is everything advantageous to life.
Ant. True ; save means to live.—*Tempest.*

FLEDA'S fatigue did not prevent her being up before sunrise the next day. Fatigue was forgotten, for the light of a fair spring morning was shining in at her windows, and she meant to see aunt Miriam before breakfast. She ran out to find Hugh, and her merry shout reached him before she did, and brought him to meet her.

" Come, Hugh ! I'm going off up to aunt Miriam's, and I want you. Come ! Isn't this delicious ? "

" Hush ! " said Hugh. " Father's just here in the barn. I can't go, Fleda."

Fleda's countenance clouded.

" Can't go ! What's the matter ? Can't you go, Hugh ? "

He shook his head and went off into the barn.

A chill came upon Fleda. She turned away with a very sober step. What if her uncle was in the barn, why should she hush ? He never had been a check upon her merriment, never ; what was coming now ? Hugh, too, looked disturbed.

Drawing a long breath, Fleda softly went on up the hill ; past the saw-mill, the ponds, the factories, the houses of the settlement. The same, and not the same. Bright with the morning sun, and yet somehow a little browner and homelier than of old they used to be. Fleda did not care for that ;

she would hardly acknowledge it to herself; her affection never made any discount for infirmity. Leaving the little settlement behind her thoughts as behind her back, she ran on now towards aunt Miriam's, breathlessly, till field after field was passed, and her eye caught a bit of the smooth lake and the old farmhouse in its old place. Very brown it looked, but Fleda dashed on, through the garden and in at the front door.

Nobody at all was in the entrance-room, the common sitting-room of the family. With trembling delight Fleda opened the well-known door and stole noiselessly through the little passage-way to the kitchen. The door of that was only on the latch, and a gentle movement of it gave to Fleda's eye the tall figure of aunt Miriam, just before her, stooping down to look in at the open mouth of the oven which she was at that moment engaged in supplying with more work to do. Fleda stood still as a mouse and breathless till her aunt turned, and then, a spring and a half-shout of joy, and she had clasped her in her arms and was crying with her whole heart. Aunt Miriam was taken all aback; she could do nothing but sit down and cry too, and forgot her oven door.

"Ain't breakfast ready yet, mother?" said a manly voice, coming in. "I must be off to see after them ploughs. Hollo! Why, mother!——"

The first exclamation was uttered as the speaker put the door to the oven's mouth; the second as he turned in quest of the hand that should have done it. He stood wondering, while his mother and Fleda, between laughing and crying, tried to rouse themselves and look up.

"What is all this?"

"Don't you see, Seth?"

"I see somebody that had like to have spoiled your whole baking. I don't know who it is yet."

"Don't you now, cousin Seth?" said Fleda, shaking away her tears and getting up.

"I ha'n't quite lost my recollection. Cousin, you must give me a kiss. How do you do? You ha'n't forgot how to colour, I see, for all you've been so long among the pale city folks."

"I haven't forgotten anything, cousin Seth," said Fleda, blushing, indeed, but laughing and shaking his hand with as hearty good-will.

"I don't believe you have—anything that is good," said he. "Where have you been all this while?"

"Oh, part of the time in New York, and part of the time in Paris, and some other places."

"Well, you ha'n't seen anything better than Queechy, or Queechy bread and butter, have you?"

"No, indeed!"

"Come, you shall give me another kiss for that," said he, suiting the action to the word; "and now sit down and eat as much bread and butter as you can."

"I don't know," said Fleda doubtfully; "they will expect me at home."

"I don't care who expects you—sit down! You ain't going to eat any bread and butter this morning but my mother's—you haven't got any like it at your house. Mother, give her a cup of coffee, will you, and set her to work."

Fleda was too willing to comply with the invitation, were it only for the charm of old times. They sat down to table, but aunt Miriam's eyes devoured Fleda. Mr. Plumfield set about his more material breakfast with all dispatch.

"So Mr. Rossitur has left the city for good," said aunt Miriam. "How does he like it?"

"He hasn't been here but a day, you know, aunt Miriam," said Fleda evasively.

"Is he anything of a farmer?" asked her cousin.

"Not much," said Fleda.

"Is he going to work the farm himself?"

"I don't know," said Fleda; "I think he is going to have a farmer and oversee things himself."

"He'll get sick o' that," said Seth; "unless he's the luck to get hold of just the right hand."

"Is Mr. Rossitur a smart man?"

"Very," Fleda said, "about everything but farming."

"Well, if he'll put himself to school maybe he'll learn," Seth concluded, as he finished his breakfast and went off. Fleda rose too, and was standing thoughtfully by the fire, when aunt Miriam came up and put her arms round her.

"You're not changed—you're the same little Fleda," she said.

"Not quite so little," said Fleda, smiling.

"Not quite so little, but my own darling. The world hasn't spoiled thee yet."

"I hope not, aunt Miriam."

"You have remembered your mother's prayer, Fleda?"

"Always!"

How tenderly aunt Miriam's hand was passed over the bowed head, how fondly she pressed her. And Fleda's answer was as fond.

"I wanted to bring Hugh up to see you, aunt Miriam, with me, but he couldn't come. You will like Hugh. He is so good!"

"I will come down and see him," said aunt Miriam; and then she went to look after her oven's doings. Fleda stood by, amused to see the quantities of nice things that were rummaged out of it.

"How early you must have been up, to put these things in," said Fleda.

"Put them in! yes, and make them. These were all made this morning, Fleda."

"This morning!—before breakfast! Why, the sun was only just rising when I set out to come up the hill; and I wasn't long coming, aunt Miriam."

"To be sure; that's the way to get things done. Before breakfast! What time do you breakfast, Fleda?"

"Not till eight or nine o'clock."

"Eight or nine!—*Here?*"

"There hasn't been any change made yet, and I don't suppose there will be. Uncle Rolf is always up early, but he can't bear to have breakfast early."

Aunt Miriam's face showed what she thought; and Fleda went away with all its gravity and doubt settled like lead upon her heart. Though she had one of the identical apple pies in her hands, which aunt Miriam had quietly said was "for her and Hugh," and though a pleasant savour of old times was about it, Fleda could not get up again the bright feeling with which she had come up the hill. There was a miserable misgiving at heart. It would work off in time.

CHAPTER XIX.

Whilst skies are blue and bright,
Whilst flowers are gay,
Whilst eyes that change ere night
Make glad the day:
Whilst yet the calm hours creep,
Dream thou—and from thy sleep
Then wake to weep.—*Shelley.*

THE days of summer flew by, for the most part lightly, over the heads of Hugh and Fleda. The farm was little to them but a place of pretty and picturesque doings and the scene of nameless delights by wood and stream, in all which, all that summer, Fleda rejoiced; pulling Hugh along with her even when sometimes he would rather have been poring over his books at home.

But the summer time came to an end.

It was a November morning, and Fleda had been doing some of the last jobs in her flower-beds. She was coming in with spirits as bright as her cheeks, when her aunt's attitude and look, more than usually spiritless, suddenly checked them. Fleda gave her a hopeful kiss and asked for the explanation. "How bright you look, darling!" said her aunt, stroking her cheek.

"Yes, but you don't, aunt Lucy. What has happened?"

"Mary and Jane are going away."

"Going away! What for?"

"They are tired of the place—don't like it, I suppose."

"Very foolish of them. Well, aunt Lucy, what matter? We can get plenty more in their room."

"Not from the city; not possible; they would not come at this time of the year."

"Sure? Well, then, here we can at any rate."

"Here! But what sort of persons shall we get here? And your uncle—just think!"

"Oh, but I think we can manage," said Fleda. "When do Mary and Jane want to go?"

"Immediately!—to-morrow—they are not willing to wait till we can get somebody. Think of it!"

"Well, let them go," said Fleda, "the sooner the better."

"Yes, and I am sure I don't want to keep them;

but——" and Mrs. Rossitur wrung her hands, "I haven't money enough to pay them quite,—and they won't go without it."

Fleda felt shocked—so much that she could not help looking it.

"But can't uncle Rolf give it you?"

Mr. Rossitur shook her head. "I have asked him."

"How much is wanting?"

"Twenty-five. Think of his not being able to give me that!"

Mrs. Rossitur burst into tears.

"Now don't, aunt Lucy!" said Fleda, guarding well her own composure; "you know he has had a great deal to spend upon the farm and paying men, and all, and it is no wonder that he should be a little short just now; now cheer up! we can get along with this anyhow."

"I asked him," said Mrs. Rossitur through her tears, "when he would be able to give it to me; and he told me he didn't know!"

Fleda ventured no reply but some of the tenderest caresses that lips and arms could give; and then sprang away and in three minutes was at her aunt's side again.

"Look here, aunt Lucy," said she gently, "here is twenty dollars, if you can manage the five."

"Where did you get this?" Mrs. Rossitur exclaimed.

"I got it honestly. It is mine, aunt Lucy," said Fleda, smiling. "Uncle Orrin gave me some money just before we came away, to do what I liked with; and I haven't wanted to do anything with it till now."

But this seemed to hurt Mrs. Rossitur more than all the rest. Leaning her head forward upon Fleda's breast and clasping her arms about her, she cried worse tears than Fleda had seen her shed. If it had not been for the emergency Fleda would have broken down utterly too.

"That it should have come to this! I can't take it, dear Fleda!"

"Yes, you must, aunt Lucy," said Fleda soothingly. "I couldn't do anything else with it that would give me so much pleasure. I don't want it—it would lie in any drawer until I don't know when. We'll let these people be off as soon as they please. Don't take it so—uncle Rolf will have money again—only just now he is out, I suppose—and we'll get somebody else in the kitchen that will do nicely—you see if we don't."

Mrs. Rossitur's embrace said what words were powerless to say.

"But I don't know how we're to find anyone here in the country; I don't know who'll go to look; I am sure your uncle won't want to,—and Hugh wouldn't know——"

"I'll go," said Fleda cheerfully; "Hugh and I. We can do famously, if you'll trust me. I won't promise to bring home a French cook."

"No, indeed—we must take what we can get. But you can get no one to-day, and they will be off by the morning's coach, what shall we do to-morrow for dinner? Your uncle——"

"I'll get dinner," said Fleda, caressing her; "I'll take all that on myself. It shan't be a bad dinner either. Uncle Rolf will like what I do for him, I dare say. Now cheer up, aunt Lucy!—do—that's all I ask of you. Won't you?—for me?"

The women were paid off and dismissed, and departed in the next day's coach from Montepoole. Fleda stood at the front door to see them go, with a curious sense that there was an empty house at her back, and indeed upon her back. And in spite of all the cheeriness of her tone to her aunt, she was not without some shadowy feeling that soberer times might be coming upon them.

"What is to be done now?" said Hugh, close beside her.

"Oh, we are going to get somebody else," said Fleda.

"Where?"

"I don't know! You and I are going to find out."

"You and I!"

"Yes. We are going out after dinner, Hugh dear," said she, turning her bright, merry face towards him, "to pick up somebody."

Linking her arm within his, she went back to the deserted kitchen premises to see how her promise about taking Mary's place was to be fulfilled.

"Do you know where to look?" said Hugh.

"I've a notion; but the first thing is dinner, that uncle Rolf mayn't think the world is turning topsy-turvy. There is nothing at all here, Hugh, nothing in the world but bread—it's a blessing there is that. Uncle Rolf will have to be satisfied with a coffee dinner to-day, and I'll make him the most superb omelette that my skill is equal to! Hugh dear, you shall set the table. You don't know how? then you shall make the toast, and I will set it the first thing of all. You perceive it is well to know how to do everything, Mr. Hugh Rossitur."

The coffee and the omelette and the toast and Mr. Rossitur's favourite French salad, were served with beautiful accuracy; and he was quite satisfied. But Aunt Lucy looked sadly at Fleda's flushed face and saw that her appetite seemed to have gone off in the steam of her preparations. Fleda had a kind of heart-feast however, which answered as well.

Hugh harnessed the little wagon, for no one was at hand to do it, and he and Fleda set off as early as possible after dinner. Fleda's thoughts had turned to her old acquaintance, Cynthia Gall, who she knew was out of employment and staying at home somewhere near Montepoole. They got the exact direction from Aunt Miriam, who approved of her plan.

It was a pleasant, peaceful drive they had.

Miss Cynthia's present abode was in an out-of-the-way place, and a good distance off; they were some time in reaching it. One would have thought it a deserted house, but that a thin wreath of smoke lazily stole up from one of the brown chimneys; and graceful as that was it took nothing from the hard, stern barrenness below which told of a worse poverty than that of painting and glazing.

The house stood back from the road. Fleda picked her way to it along a little footpath which seemed to be the equal property of the geese. Her knock brought an invitation to "come in."

An elderly woman was sitting there whose appearance did not mend the general impression. She had the same dull and unhopeful look that her house had.

"Does Mrs. Gall live here?"

"I do," said this person.

"Is Cynthia at home?"

The woman upon this raised her voice and directed it at an inner door.

"Lucindy?" said she, in a diversity of tones,—"Lucindy;—tell Cynthy here's somebody wants to see her." But no one answered, and throwing the work from her lap the woman muttered she would go and see, and left Fleda with a cold invitation to sit down.

Dismal work! Fleda wished herself out of it. The house did not look poverty-stricken within, but poverty must have struck to the very heart, Fleda thought, where there was no apparent cherishing of anything. There was no absolute distress visible, neither was there a sign of real comfort or of a happy home. She could not fancy it was one.

She waited so long that she was sure Cynthia did not hold

herself in readiness to see company. And when the lady at last came in it was with very evident marks of "smarting up" about her.

"Why, it's Flidda Ringgan?" said Miss Gall, after a dubious look or two at her visitor. "How *do* you do? I didn't expect to see *you*. How much you have growed!"

She looked really pleased and gave Fleda's hand a very strong grasp as she shook it.

"I have come to see if you wouldn't come and live with my aunt, Mrs. Rossitur," said Fleda, proceeding straight to business. "We are left alone and want somebody very much; and I thought I would find you out and see if we couldn't have you, first of all, before I looked for anybody else."

Cynthy was absolutely silent, but there was in the corners of her mouth the threatening of a smile that Fleda did not at all like.

"What do you say to it, Cynthy?"

"I reckon you'd best get somebody else," said Miss Gall, with a kind of condescending dryness, and the smile shewing a little more.

"Why?" said Fleda. "I would a great deal rather have an old friend than a stranger."

"Be you the housekeeper?" said Cynthy, a little abruptly.

"Oh, I am a little of everything," said Fleda, "cook and housekeeper and whatever comes first. I want you to come and be housekeeper, Cynthy."

"I reckon Mis' Rossitur don't have much to do with her help, does she?" said Cynthy, after a pause, during which the corners of her mouth never changed. The tone of piqued independence let some light into Fleda's mind.

"She is not strong enough to do much herself, and she wants someone that will take all the trouble from her. You'd have the field all to yourself, Cynthy."

"Your aunt sets two tables, I calculate, don't she?"

"Yes; my uncle doesn't like to have any but his own family around him."

"I guess I shouldn't suit!" said Miss Gall, after another little pause, and stooping very diligently to pick up some scattered shreds from the floor. But Fleda could see the flushed face and the smile which pride and a touch of spiteful pleasure in the revenge she was taking made particularly hateful. She needed no more convincing that Miss Gall "wouldn't suit"; but she was sorry at the same time for the perverseness that had so needlessly disappointed her; and went

rather pensively back again down the little footpath to the waiting wagon.

"This is hardly the romance of life, dear Hugh," she said, as she seated herself.

"Haven't you succeeded?"

Fleda shook her head.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh—pride—injured pride of station! The wrong of not coming to our table and putting her knife into our butter."

"And living in such a place!" said Hugh.

"You don't know what a place. They are miserably poor, I am sure; and yet—I suppose that the less people have to be proud of the more they make of what is left. Poor people!"

"Poor Fleda!" said Hugh, looking at her. "What will you do now?"

"Oh, we'll do somehow," said she cheerfully. "Perhaps it is just as well, after all, for Cynthy isn't the smartest woman in the world. I remember grandpa used to say he didn't believe she could get a bean into the middle of her bread."

"A bean into the middle of her bread!" said Hugh.

But Fleda's sobriety was quite banished by his mystified look, and her laugh rang along over the fields before she answered him.

That laugh had blown away all the vapours, for the present at least, and they jogged on again very sociably.

They had several miles yet to go, and the sun went down as they were passing through Queechy run. Under that still cool, clear autumn sky Fleda would have enjoyed the ride very much, but that her unfulfilled errand was weighing upon her, and she feared her aunt and uncle might want her services before she could be at home. Still, late as it was, she determined to stop for a minute at Mrs. Finn's, where she had been recommended that she might find a servant.

Mrs. Finn's house was a great unprepossessing building, washed and dried by the rain and sun into a dark, dingy colour, the only one that had supplanted the original hue of the fresh-sawn boards. This indeed was not an uncommon thing in the country; near all the houses of the Deepwater settlement were in the same case. Fleda went up a flight of steps to what seemed the front door, but the girl that answered her knock led her down them again and round to a lower entrance on the other side. This introduced Fleda to a large, ground-floor apartment, probably the common room of the family, with the large kitchen fireplace and flagged hearth and

wall cupboards, and the only furniture the usual red-backed splinter chairs and wooden table. A woman standing before the fire with a broom in her hand answered Fleda's inclination with a saturnine nod of the head, and fetching one of the red-backs from the wall bade her "sit down."

Poor Fleda's nerves bade her "go away." The people looked like their house. The principal woman, who remained standing broom in hand to hear Fleda's business, was in good truth a dark personage; her head covered with black hair, her person with a dingy black calico, and a sullen cloud lowering over her eye. At the corner of the fireplace was an old woman, laid by in an easy chair; disabled, it was plain, not from mental, but bodily infirmity; for her face had a cast of mischief which could not stand with the innocence of second childhood. At the other corner sat an elderly woman sewing, with tokens of her trade for yards on the floor around her. Back at the far side of the room a young man was eating his supper at the table alone; and *under* the table, on the floor, the enormous family bread trough was unwontedly filled with the sewing woman's child, which had with superhuman efforts crawled into it and lay kicking and crowing in delight at its new cradle. Fleda did not know how to enter upon her business.

"I have been looking," she began, "for a person who is willing to go out to work."

"Somebody to help?" said the woman, beginning to use her broom upon the hearth. "Who wants 'em?"

"Mrs. Rossitur—my aunt."

"Mrs. Rossitur?—what, down to old Squire Ringgan's place?"

"Yes. We are left alone, and want somebody very much."

"Do you want her only a few days, or do you calculate to have her stop longer?"

"Oh, we want her to stay—if we suit each other."

"Well, I don't know," said the woman, going on with her sweeping, "I could let you have Hannah, but I 'spect I'll want her to hum. What does Mis' Rossitur calculate to give?"

"I don't know—anything that's reasonable."

"Hannah kin go—just as good as not," said the old woman in the corner, rubbing her hands up and down her lap; "Hannah kin go, just as good as not!"

"Hannah ain't a going," said the first speaker, answering without looking at her. "There's Lucy—if she took a notion

she could go—but she'd please herself about it. She won't do nothing without she has a notion."

This was inconclusive, and desiring to bring matters to a point, Fleda after a pause asked if this lady thought Lucy would have a notion to go.

"Well, I can't say—she ain't to hum or you could ask her. She's down to Mis' Douglass, working for her to-day. Do you know Mis' Douglass?—Earl Douglass' wife?"

"Oh, yes, I knew her long ago," said Fleda, thinking it might be as well to throw in a spice of ingratiation; "I am Fleda Ringgan. I used to live here with my grandfather."

"Don't say? Well, I thought you had a kind o' look—the old Squire's granddarter, ain't you?"

"She looks like her father," said the sewing-woman, laying down her needle, which indeed had been little hindrance to her admiration since Fleda came in.

"She's a real pretty gal," said the old woman in the corner.

"He was as smart a lookin' man as there was in Queechy township, or Montepoole either," the sewing-woman went on. "Do you mind him, Flidda?"

"Anastasy," said the old woman aside, "let Hannah go!"

"Hannah's going to keep to hum! Well, about Lucy," she said, as Fleda rose to go,—"I can't just say—suppos'n you come here to-morrow afternoon—there's a few coming to quilt, and Lucy'll be to hum then. I should admire to have you,—and then you and Lucy can agree what you'll fix upon. You can get somebody to bring you, can't you?"

Fleda inwardly shrank, but managed to get off with thanks and without making a positive promise, which Miss Anastasia would fain have had. She was glad to be out of the house and driving off with Hugh.

CHAPTER XX.

With superfluity of breeding
First makes you sick, and then with feeding.—*Jenyns.*

Miss Anastasia was a little surprised and a good deal gratified, Fleda saw, by her coming, and played the hostess with great benignity. The quilting-frame was stretched in an upper room, not in the long kitchen, to Fleda's joy; most of the company were already seated at it, and she had to go through a long string of introductions before she was permitted to take her place. First of all, Earl Douglass's wife, who rose up and taking both Fleda's hands squeezed and shook them heartily, giving her with eye and lip a most genial welcome. This lady had every look of being a very *clever* woman; "a manager" she was said to be; and indeed her very nose had a little pinch which prepared one for nothing superfluous about her. Even her dress could not have wanted another breadth from the skirt and had no fulness to spare about the body. Neat as a pin though, and a well-to-do look through it all. Miss Quackenboss, Fleda recognised as an old friend, gilt beads and all. Catherine Douglass had grown up to a pretty girl during the five years since Fleda had left Queechy, and gave her a greeting half smiling, half shy. There was a little more affluence about the flow of her drapery, and the pink ribbon round her neck was confined by a little dainty Jew's harp of a brooch; she had her mother's pinch of the nose, too. Then there were two other young ladies—Miss Letitia Ann Thornton, a tall grown girl in pantalettes, evidently a would-be aristocrat, from the air of her head and lip, with a well-looking face and looking well knowing of the same, and sporting neat little white cuffs at her wrists, the only one who bore such a distinction. The third of these damsels, Jessie Healy, impressed Fleda with having been brought up upon coarse meat and having grown heavy in consequence; the other two were extremely fair and delicate, both in complexion and feature. Her aunt Syra Fleda recognised without particular pleasure, and managed to seat herself at the quilt with the sewing-woman and Miss Hannah between them. Miss Lucy Finn she found seated at her right hand, but after all the civilities she had just gone through Fleda had not courage just then to dash

into business with her, and Miss Lucy herself stitched away and was dumb.

So were the rest of the party, rather. The presence of the new-comer seemed to have the effect of a spell. Fleda could not think they had been as silent before her joining them as they were for some time afterwards. The young ladies were absolutely mute, and conversation seemed to flag, even among the elder ones; and if Fleda ever raised her eyes from the quilt to look at somebody, she was sure to see somebody's eyes looking at her with a curiosity well enough defined and mixed with a more or *less* amount of benevolence and pleasure. Fleda was growing very industrious and feeling her cheeks grow warm, when the checked stream of conversation began to take revenge by turning its tide upon her.

"Are you glad to be back to Queechy, Fleda?" said Mrs. Douglass from the opposite far end of the quilt.

"Yes, ma'am," said Fleda, smiling back her answer; "on some accounts."

"Ain't she growed like her father, Mis' Douglass?" said the sewing-woman. "Do you recollect Walter Ringgan; what a handsome feller he was?"

The two opposite girls immediately found something to say to each other.

"She ain't a bit more like him than she is like her mother," said Mrs. Douglass, biting off the end of her thread energetically.

"Amy Ringgan was a sweet good woman as ever was in this town."

Again her daughter's glance and smile went over to the speaker.

"You stay in Queechy and live like Queechy folks do," Mrs. Douglass added, nodding encouragingly, "and you'll beat both on 'em."

But this speech jarred, and Fleda wished it had not been spoken.

"How does your uncle like farming?" said Aunt Syra.

A home-thrust, which Fleda parried by saying he had hardly got accustomed to it yet.

"What's been his business? what has he been doing all his life till now?" said the sewing-woman.

Fleda replied that he had had no business; and after the minds of the company had had time to entertain this statement, she was startled by Miss Lucy's voice at her elbow.

"It seems kind o' curious, don't it, that a man should live

to be forty or fifty years old, and not know anything of the earth he gets his bread from ? "

" What makes you think he don't ? " said Miss Thornton, rather tartly.

" She wa'n't speaking o' nobody," said aunt Syra.

" I was—I was speaking of *man*—I was speaking abstractly," said Fleda's right-hand neighbour.

" What's abstractly ? " said Miss Anastasia scornfully.

" Where do you get hold of such hard words, Lucy ? " said Mrs. Douglass.

" I don't know, Mis' Douglass ; they come to me ; it's practice, I suppose. I had no intention of being obscure."

" One kind o' word's as easy as another, I suppose, when you're used to it, ain't it ? " said the sewing woman.

" What's abstractly ? " said the mistress of the house again.

" Look in the dictionary, if you want to know," said her sister.

" I don't want to know—I only want you to tell."

" When do you get time for it, Lucy ; han't you nothing else to practice ? " pursued Mrs. Douglass.

" Yes, Mis' Douglass ; but then there are times for exertion, and other times less disposable ; and when I feel thoughtful, or low, I commonly retire to my room and contemplate the stars or write a composition."

The sewing-woman greeted this speech with an unqualified ha ! ha ! and Fleda involuntarily raised her head to look at the last speaker ; but there was nothing to be noticed about her except that she was in rather nicer order than the rest of the Finn family.

" And where have you been, Fleda, all this while ? " said Mrs. Douglass.

Fleda told, upon which all the quilting-party raised their heads simultaneously to take another review of her.

" You uncle's wife ain't a Frenchwoman, be she ? " asked the sewing-woman.

Fleda said, " Oh, no ! "

" She lives like one, don't she ? " said aunt Syra.

Which imputation Fleda also refuted to the best of her power.

" Well, don't she have dinner in the middle of the afternoon ? " pursued aunt Syra.

Fleda was obliged to admit that.

" And she can't eat without she has a fresh piece of roast meat on table every day, can she ? "

"It is not always roast," said Fleda, half vexed and half laughing.

"I'd rather have a good dish o' bread and 'lassies than the hull on't;" observed old Mrs. Finn; from the corner where she sat manifestly turning up her nose at the far-off joints on Mrs. Rossitur's dinner-table.

The girls on the other side of the quilt again held counsel together, deep and low.

"Well, didn't she pick up all them notions in that place yonder? where you say she has been?" aunt Syra went on.

"No," said Fleda; "everybody does so in New York."

"I should admire to travel in many countries," said Miss Lucy, for the first time seeming to intend her words particularly for Fleda's ear. "I think nothing makes people more genteel. I have observed it frequently."

Fleda said it was very pleasant; but though encouraged by this opening could not muster enough courage to ask if Miss Lucy had a "notion" to come and prove their gentility. Her next question was startling,—if Fleda had ever studied mathematics?

"No," said Fleda. "Have you?"

"Oh my, yes! There was a lot of us concluded we would learn it; and we commenced to study it a long time ago. I think it's a most elevating——"

The discussion was suddenly broken off, by the arrival of Hugh to take Fleda home.

Though Fleda's desire for Miss Lucy's "help" had considerably lessened she thought she could not in politeness avoid speaking on the subject, after being invited there on purpose. But Miss Lucy said she "calculated to stay at home this winter," unless she went to live with somebody at Kenton, for the purpose of attending a course of philosophy lectures that she heard were to be given there. So that matter was settled; and clasping Hugh's arm Fleda turned away from the house with a step and heart both lightened by the joy of being out of it.

"I couldn't come sooner, Fleda," said Hugh.

"No matter—Oh I'm so glad to be away! Walk a little faster, dear Hugh. Have you missed me at home?"

"Do you want me to say no or yes?" said Hugh smiling. "We did very well—mother and I—and I left everything ready to have tea the minute you get home. What sort of a time have you had?"

In answer to which Fleda gave him a long history; and

then they walked on awhile in silence. The evening was still and would have been dark but for the extreme brilliancy of the stars through the keen clear atmosphere. Fleda looked up at them and drew large draughts of bodily and mental refreshment with the bracing air.

"Do you know to-morrow will be Thanksgiving day?"

"Yes—what made you think of it?"

"They were talking about it—they make a great fuss here Thanksgiving day."

"I don't think we shall make much of a fuss," said Hugh.

"I don't think we shall. I wonder what I shall do—I am afraid uncle Rolf will get tired of coffee and omelettes in the course of time; and my list of receipts is very limited."

"It is a pity you didn't beg one of Mrs. Renney's books," said Hugh laughing. "If you had only known——"

"'Tisn't too late!" said Fleda quickly, "I'll send to New York for one. I will! I'll ask uncle Orrin to get it for me. That's the best thought!"

"But Fleda! you're not going to turn cook in that fashion!"

"It would be no harm to have the book," said Fleda. "I can tell you we mustn't expect to get anybody here that can make an omelette, or even coffee, that uncle Rolf will drink. Oh Hugh!"

"What?"

"I don't know where we are going to get anybody! But don't say anything to aunt Lucy about it."

"Well, we can keep Thanksgiving day, Fleda, without a dinner," said Hugh cheerfully.

As Hugh and Fleda went quick up to the kitchen door they overtook a dark figure, at whom looking narrowly as she passed, Fleda recognised Seth Plumfield. He was joyfully let into the kitchen, and there proved to be the bearer of a huge dish carefully covered with a napkin.

"Mother guessed you hadn't any Thanksgiving ready," he said, "and she wanted to send this down to you; so I thought I would come and fetch it myself."

"Oh thank her! and thank you, cousin Seth; how good you are!"

"Mother ha'n't lost her old trick at 'em," said he, "so I hope *that's* good."

"Oh I know it is," said Fleda. "I remember aunt Miriam's Thanksgiving chicken-pies. Now cousin Seth, you must come in and see aunt Lucy."

"No," said he quietly, "I've got my farm boots on—I guess I won't see anybody but you."

But Fleda would not suffer that, and finding she could not move him she brought her aunt out into the kitchen. Mrs. Rossitur's manner of speaking and thanking quite charmed Seth, and he went away with a kindly feeling towards those gentle bright eyes which he never forgot.

"Now we've something for to-morrow, Hugh!" said Fleda; "and such a chicken-pie I can tell you as *you* never saw. Hugh, isn't it odd how different a thing is in different circumstances? You don't know how glad I was when I put my hands upon that warm pie-dish and knew what it was; and when did I ever care in New York about Emile's doing?"

"Except the almond gauffres," said Hugh smiling.

"I never thought to be so glad of a chicken-pie," said Fleda shaking her head.

Aunt Miriam's dish bore out Fleda's praise, in the opinion of all that tasted it; for such fowls, such butter, and such cream, as went to its composition could hardly be known but in an unsophisticated state of society. But one pie could not last for ever; and as soon as the signs of dinner were got rid of, Thanksgiving day though it was, poor Fleda was fain to go up the hill to consult aunt Miriam about the possibility of getting "help."

"I don't know, dear Fleda," said she; "if you cannot get Lucy Finn—I don't know who else there is you can get. Do you remember Barby Elster, that used to live with me?"

"Oh yes."

"She *might* go—she has been staying at home these two years, to take care of her old mother, that's the reason she left me; but she has another sister come home now—Hetty, that married and went to Montepoole, she's lost her husband and come home to live; so perhaps Barby would go out again. But I don't know, how do you think your Aunt Lucy would get along with her?"

"Dear aunt Miriam! you know we must do as we can. We *must* have somebody."

"Barby is a little quick," said Mrs. Plumfield, "but I think she is good-hearted, and she is thorough, and faithful as the day is long. If your aunt and uncle can put up with her ways."

"I think we can get along. I know Barby used to like me."

"But then Barby knows nothing about French cooking,

my child ; she can do nothing but the common country things. What will your uncle and aunt say to that ? "

" I don't know," said Fleda, " but anything is better than nothing. I must try and do what she can't do. I'll come up and get you to teach me, aunt Miriam."

Aunt Miriam hugged and kissed her before speaking.

" I'll teach you what I know, my darling ; and now we'll go right off and see Barby—we shall catch her just in a good time."

It was a poor little unpainted house, standing back from the road, and with a double row of boards laid down to serve as a path to it. They went in without knocking. There was nobody there but an old woman seated before the fire, shaking all over with the St. Vitus's Dance. She gave them no salutation, calling instead on " Barby ! " who presently made her appearance from the inner door.

" Barby ! who's this ? "

" That's Miss Plumfield, mother," said the daughter, speaking loud as if to a deaf person.

The old lady immediately got up and dropped a very quick and what was meant to be a very respect-showing curtsey, saying at the same time with much deference and with one of her involuntary twitches, " I 'maun to know." The sense of the ludicrous and the feeling of pity together were painfully oppressive. Fleda turned away to the daughter who came forward and shook hands with a frank look of pleasure at the sight of her elder visitor.

" Barby," said Mrs. Plumfield, " this is little Fleda Ringgan —do you remember her ? "

" I' mind to know ! " said Barby, transferring her hand to Fleda's and giving it a good squeeze. " She's growed a fine gal, Mis' Plumfield. You ain't lost none of your good looks—ha' you kept all your old goodness along with 'em ? "

Fleda laughed at this abrupt question, and said she didn't know.

" If you ha'n't, I wouldn't give much for your eyes," said Barby letting go her hand.

Mrs. Plumfield laughed, too, at Barby's equivocal mode of complimenting.

" Who's that young gal, Barby ? " inquired Mrs. Elster.

" That's Mis' Plumfield's niece, mother ! "

" She's a handsome little creetur, ain't she ? "

They all laughed at that, and Fleda's cheeks growing

crimson, Mrs. Plumfield stepped forward to ask after the old lady's health; and while she talked and listened Fleda's eyes noticed the spotless condition of the room.

"Barby, you are not tied at home any longer, are you?" said Mrs. Plumfield, coming back from the old lady and speaking rather low; "now that Hetty is here can't your mother spare you?"

"Well—I reckon she could, Mis' Plumfield—if I could work it so that she'd be more comfortable by my being away."

"Then you'd have no objection to go out again?"

"Where to?"

"Fleda's uncle, you know, has taken my brother's old place, and they have no help. They want somebody to take the whole management—just you, Barby. Mrs. Rossitur isn't strong."

"Nor don't want to be, does she? I've heerd tell of her. Mis' Plumfield, I should despise to have as many legs and arms as other folks and not be able to help myself!"

"But you wouldn't despise to help other folks, I hope," said Mrs. Plumfield smiling.

"People that want you very much too," said Fleda; for she quite longed to have that strong hand and healthy eye to rely upon at home. Barby looked at her with a relaxed face, and after a little consideration said "she guessed she'd try."

"I am very glad we are to have Barby instead of that Lucy Finn," said Fleda as they left the house. "Oh, Aunt Miriam! you can't think how much easier my heart feels."

"Poor child!" said Aunt Miriam looking at her. "But it isn't best, Fleda, to have things work too smooth in this world."

"No, I suppose not," said Fleda sighing. "Isn't it very strange, Aunt Miriam, that it should make people worse instead of better to have everything go pleasantly with them?"

"It is because they are apt then to be so full of the present that they forget the care of the future."

"Yes, and forget there is anything better than the present, I suppose," said Fleda.

"So we mustn't fret at the ways our Father takes to keep us from hurting ourselves?" said Aunt Miriam cheerfully.

"Oh, no!" said Fleda, looking up brightly in answer to

the tender manner in which these words were spoken ; " and I didn't mean that *this* is much of a trouble, only I am very glad to think that somebody is coming to-morrow."

Aunt Miriam thought that gentle unfretful face could not stand in need of much discipline.

CHAPTER XXI.

Wise men alway
Affyrme and say,
That best is for a man,
Diligently,
For to apply,
The business that he can.—*More.*

Fleda waited for Barby's coming next day with a little anxiety. The introduction and installation however were happily got over. Mrs. Rossitur, as Fleda knew, was most easily pleased ; and Barby Elster's quick eye was satisfied with the unaffected and universal gentleness and politeness of her new employer. She made herself at home in half an hour ; and Mrs. Rossitur and Fleda were comforted to perceive by unmistakable signs, that their presence was not needed in the kitchen, and they might retire to their own premises and forget there was another part of the house. Fleda had forgotten it utterly, and deliciously enjoying the rest of mind and body, she was stretched upon the sofa, luxuriating over some volume from the remnant of a library ; when the inner door was suddenly pushed open far enough to admit of the entrance of Miss Elster's head.

" Where's the soft soap ? "

Fleda's book went down and her heart jumped to her mouth, for her uncle was sitting over by the window. Mrs. Rossitur looked up in a maze and waited for the question to be repeated.

" I say, where's the soft soap ? "

"Soft soap!" said Mrs. Rossitur, "I don't know whether there is any. Fleda, do you know?"

"I was trying to think, Aunt Lucy—I don't believe there is any."

"*Where* is it?" said Barby.

"There is none, I believe," said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Where *was* it, then?"

"Nowhere—there has not been any in the house," said Fleda, raising herself up to see over the back of her sofa.

"There ha'n't been none!" said Miss Elster, in a tone more significant than her words, and shutting the door as abruptly as she had opened it.

"What on earth does the woman mean?" exclaimed Mr. Rossitur, springing up and advancing towards the kitchen door. Fleda threw herself before him.

"Nothing at all, Uncle Rolf—she doesn't mean anything at all—she doesn't know any better."

"I will improve her knowledge—get out of the way, Fleda."

"But, Uncle Rolf, just hear me one moment—please don't, she didn't mean any harm—these people don't know any manners—just let me speak to her, please uncle Rolf!" said Fleda, laying both hands upon her uncle's arms, "I'll manage her."

Mr. Rossitur's wrath was high.

"*You* manage her!" said he.

"Yes," said Fleda laughing and now exerting her force she gently pushed him back towards the seat he had quitted. "yes, Uncle Rolf, you've enough else to manage, don't undertake our 'help.' Deliver over all your displeasure upon me when anything goes wrong. I will be the conductor to carry it off safely into the kitchen and discharge it just at that point where I think it will do most execution. Now will you, Uncle Rolf? Because we have got a new-fashioned piece of firearms in the other room that I am afraid will go off unexpectedly if it is meddled with by an unskilful hand; and that would leave us without arms, you see, or with only Aunt Lucy's and mine, which are not reliable."

"You saucy girl!" said her uncle, who was laughing partly at and partly with her. "I don't know what you deserve exactly. Well, keep this precious new operative of yours out of my way and I'll take care to keep out of hers. But mind, you must manage not to have your piece snapping in my face in this fashion, for I won't stand it."

And so, quieted, Mr. Rossitur sat down to his book again; and Fleda, leaving hers open, went to attend upon Barby.

From that time Fleda had no more trouble with her uncle and Barby. Each seemed to have a wholesome appreciation of the other's combative qualities and to shun them. With Mrs. Rossitur Barby was soon all-powerful. It was enough that she wanted a thing, if Mrs. Rossitur's own resources could compass it. For Fleda, to say that Barby had presently a perfect understanding with her and joined to that a most affectionate careful regard, is not perhaps saying much; for it was true of every one without exception with whom Fleda had much to do. Barby was to all of them a very great comfort and stand-by.

It was well for them that they had her within doors to keep things, as she called it, "right and tight"; for abroad the only system in vogue was one of fluctuation and uncertainty. Mr. Rossitur's Irishman, Donohan, staid his year out, doing as little good and as much at least negative harm as he well could; and then went, leaving them a good deal poorer than he found them. Dr. Gregory's generosity had added to Mr. Rossitur's own small stock of ready money, giving him the means to make some needed outlays on the farm. But the outlay, ill-applied, had been greater than the income; a scarcity of money began to be more and more felt; and the comfort of the family accordingly drew within more and more narrow bounds. The temper of the head of the family suffered in at least equal degree.

On the first dismissal of Donohan Fleda hoped for a good turn of affairs. But Mr. Rossitur, disgusted with his first experiment, resolved this season to be his own head man; and appointed Lucas Springer the second in command, with a posse of labourers to execute his decrees. It did not work well. Mr. Rossitur found he had a very tough prime minister, who would have every one of his plans to go through a kind of winnowing process by being tossed about in an argument. The arguments were interminable, until Mr. Rossitur not unfrequently quit the field with, "Well, do what you like about it!" not conquered, but wearied. The labourers, either from want of ready money or of what they called "manners" in their employer, fell off at the wrong times, just when they were most wanted.

"I am going to wash my hands of these miserable farm affairs," said Mr. Rossitur.

"Are you?" said his wife.

"Yes—of all personal concern in them, that is. I am wearied to death with the perpetual annoyances and vexations and petty calls upon my time —life is not worth having at such a rate! I'll have done with it."

"You will give up the entire charge to Lucas?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Lucas!—No!—I wouldn't undergo that man's tongue for another year if he would take out his wages in talking. I could not have more of it in that case than I have had the last six months. After money, the thing that man loves best is certainly the sound of his own voice; and a most insufferable egotist! No—I have been talking with a man who wants to take the whole farm for two years upon shares—that will clear me of all trouble."

There was sober silence for a few minutes, and then Mrs. Rossitur asked who it was.

"His name is Didenhover."

"O uncle Rolf, don't have anything to do with him!" exclaimed Fleda.

"Why not?"

"Because he lived with grandpa a great while ago, and behaved very ill. Grandpa had a great deal of trouble with him."

"How old were you then?"

"I was young, to be sure," said Fleda, hanging her head, "but I remember very well how it was."

"You may have occasion to remember it a second time," said Mr. Rossitur dryly, "for the thing is done. I have engaged him."

Not another word was spoken. Mr. Rossitur went out.

"I am going up the hill to get a sight of aunt Miriam," said Fleda, bringing her eyes from the fire upon her aunt.

"Well, dear, do. You have been shut up long enough by the snow. Wrap yourself up well, and put on my snow-boots."

Fleda set out upon her walk; the lines of her face settling into a most fixed gravity as soon as she turned away from the house.

Aunt Miriam was in high tide of business over a pot of boiling lard, and the enormous bread-tray by the side of the fire was half full of very tempting light-brown cruller, which however were little more than a kind of sweet bread for the workmen. In the bustle of putting in and taking out aunt Miriam could give her visitor but a word and look.

Fleda pulled off her hood and sitting down watched in unusual silence the old lady's operations.

"And how are they all at your house to-day?" aunt Miriam asked as she was carefully draining her cruller out of the kettle.

Fleda answered that they were all well as usual, but a slight hesitation and the tell-tale tone of her voice made the old lady look at her more narrowly. She came near and kissed that gentle brow, and looking in her eyes asked her what the matter was?

"We are not getting along well at home."

"I supposed that," said Mrs. Plumfield quietly. "But anything new?"

"Yes—uncle Rolf has let the farm—only think of it; he has let the farm to that Didenhover."

"Didenhover!"

"For two years."

"Did you tell him what you knew about him?"

"Yes, but it was too late—the mischief was done."

Aunt Miriam went on skimming out her cruller with a very grave face.

"How came your uncle to do so without learning about him first?"

"Oh I don't know! he was in a hurry to do anything that would take the trouble of the farm off his hands; he don't like it."

"Has he let Didenhover have the saw-mill, too?"

"I don't know; he didn't say. If he has there will be nothing at all left for us to live upon. Oh, if it wasn't for aunt Lucy and Hugh I shouldn't care."

"What has your uncle been doing all this year past?"

"I don't know, aunt Miriam; he can't bear the business and he has left the most of it to Lucas; and I think Lucas is more of a talker than a doer. Almost nothing has gone right."

"He ought to have had a thorough good man at the beginning, to get along well."

"Oh yes; but he hadn't, you see; and so we have just been growing poorer every month. And now, aunt Miriam, I really don't know from day to day what to do to get a dinner. You know for a good while after we came we used to have our marketing brought every few days from Albany; but we have run up such a bill there already at the butcher's as I don't know when in the world will get paid; and aunt Lucy and I will do anything before we will send for any more; and if it

wasn't for her and Hugh I wouldn't care, but they haven't much appetite, and I know that all this takes what little they have away—this, and seeing the effect it has upon uncle Rolf——"

"Does he think so much more of eating than of anything else?" said Aunt Miriam.

"Oh no, it is not that!" said Fleda, earnestly; "it is not that at all. He is not a great eater, but he can't bear to have things different from what they used to be and from what they ought to be. Oh, no, don't think that. I don't know whether I ought to have said what I have said, but I couldn't help it——"

Fleda's voice was lost for a little while.

"He is changed from what he used to be: a little thing vexes him now, and I know it is because he is not happy. He used to be so kind and pleasant, and he is still, sometimes; but aunt Lucy's face—oh, aunt Miriam——!"

"Why, dear?" said aunt Miriam, tenderly.

"It is so changed from what it used to be!"

Poor Fleda covered her own, and aunt Miriam came to her side to give softer and gentler expression to sympathy than words could do; till the bowed face was raised again and hid in her neck.

"I can't see thee do so my child—my dear child! Hope for brighter days, dear Fleda."

"I could bear it," said Fleda after a little interval, "if it wasn't for aunt Lucy and Hugh—oh, that is the worst!"

"My dear little Fleda!"—and there was unspeakable tenderness in the old lady's voice, as she came up and drew Fleda's head again to rest upon her; "I would not let a rough wind touch thee if I had the holding of it. But we may be glad the arranging of things is not in my hand—I should be a poor friend after all, for I do not know what is best. Canst thou trust Him who does know, my child?"

"I do, Aunt Miriam,—Oh I do," said Fleda, burying her face in her bosom; "I don't often feel so as I did to-day."

"There comes not a cloud that its shadow is not wanted," said aunt Miriam. "I cannot see why; but it is that thou mayest bloom the brighter, my dear one."

"I know it"—Fleda's words were hardly audible—"I will try."

Fleda wept for a minute on the old lady's neck, and then she looked up, dried her tears, and sat down with a face greatly quieted and lightened of its burden.

"Well," said Fleda, in a tone again steady and clear. "I

must go home to see about getting up a dinner. I am the greatest hand at making something out of nothing, aunt Miriam, that ever you saw. There is nothing like practice. I only wish the man uncle Orrin talks about would come along once in a while."

"Who was that?" said aunt Miriam.

"A man that used to go about from house to house," said Fleda laughing, "when the cottagers were making soup, with a ham-bone to give it a relish, and he used to charge them so much for a dip, and so much for a wallop."

"Come come, I can do as much for you as that," said aunt Miriam, proceeding to her store-pantry, "see here—wouldn't this be as good as a ham-bone?" said she, bringing out of it a fat fowl; "how would a wallop of this do?"

"Admirably!—only—the ham-bone used to come out again, and I am confident this never would."

"Well, I guess I'll stand that," said aunt Miriam smiling, "you wouldn't mind carrying this under your cloak, would you?"

"I have no doubt I shall go home lighter with it than without it, ma'am. Thank you dear aunty! dear aunt Miriam!"

There was a change of tone, and of eye, as Fleda sealed each thank with a kiss.

"Well, good-bye, dear Aunt Miriam, I must run home to take care of my chicken."

She ran away; and if her eyes many a time on the way down the hill filled and overflowed, they were not bitter nor dark tears; they were the gushings of high and pure and generous affections, weeping for fulness, not for want.

That same evening Seth Plumfield came into the kitchen while Fleda was there.

"Here is something belongs to you, I believe," said he with a covert smile, bringing out from under his cloak the mate to Fleda's fowl; "mother said somethin' had run away with t'other one and she didn't know what to do with this one alone. Your uncle at home?"

The next news that Fleda heard was that Seth had taken a lease of the saw-mill for two years.

Mr. Didenhover did not disappoint Fleda's expectations. Very little could be got from him or the farm under him beyond the immediate supply wanted for the use of the family; and that in kind, not in cash. Mrs. Rossitur was comforted by knowing that some portion of rent had also gone to Dr. Gregory—how large or how small a portion she

could not find out. But this left the family in increasing straits, which narrowed and narrowed during the whole first summer and winter of Didenhover's administration. Very straitened they would have been but for the means of relief adopted by the two *children*, as they were always called. Hugh, as soon as the spring opened, had a quiet hint, through Fleda, that if he had a mind to take the working of the saw-mill he might, for a consideration merely nominal. This offer was immediately and gratefully closed with; and Hugh's earnings were thenceforward very important at home. Fleda had her own ways and means. Mr. Rossitur, more low-spirited and gloomy than ever, seemed to have no heart for anything. He would have worked perhaps if he could have done it alone; but to join Didenhover and his men, or any other gang of workmen, was too much for his magnanimity.

CHAPTER XXII.

Some bring a capon, some a rurall cake,
Some nuts, some apples; some that thinke they make
The better cheeses, bring 'hem; or else send
By their ripe daughters, whom they would commend
This way to husbands; and whose baskets beare
An embleme of themselves, in plum or peare.—*Ben Jonson.*

So the time walked away, for this family was not now of those "whom time runneth withal," to the second summer of Mr. Didenhover's term.

One morning Mrs. Rossitur was seated in the breakfast-room at her usual employment, mending and patching; no sinecure now. Fleda opened the kitchen door and came in folding up a calico apron she had just taken off.

"You are tired, dear," said Mrs. Rossitur sorrowfully; "you look pale."

"Do I?" said Fleda sitting down. "I am a little tired!"

"Why do you do so?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Fleda cheerfully. "What do you think I have a mind to do now, by way of resting myself?"

"Well?" said Mrs. Rossitur, thinking of something else. "It is the day for making presents to the minister you know?"

"The minister?"

"Yes, the new minister—they expect him to-day; you have heard of it; the things are all to be carried to his house to-day. I have a great notion to go and see the fun—if I only had anything in the world I could possibly take with me."

"Aren't you too tired, dear?"

"No—it would rest me—it is early yet—if I only had something to take! I couldn't go without taking something——"

"A basket of eggs?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Can't, aunt Lucy—I can't spare them; so many of the hens are sitting now. A basket of strawberries!—that's the thing! I've got enough picked for that and to-night, too. That will do!"

Fleda's preparations were soon made, and with her basket on her arm she set forth.

The parsonage-house was about a quarter of a mile, a little more, from the saw-mill, in a line at right angles with the main road. Here were aunt Syra and Mrs. Douglass, appointed a committee to receive and dispose the offerings as they were brought in.

"Why there is not much to be seen yet," said Fleda. "I did not know I was so early."

"Time enough," said Mrs. Douglass. "They'll come the thicker when they do come. Good-morning, Dr. Quackenboss. I hope you're a going to give us something else besides a bow? and I won't take none of your physic either."

"I humbly submit," said the doctor graciously, "that nothing ought to be expected of gentlemen that—a—are so unhappy as to be alone; for they really—a—have nothing to give, but themselves."

There was a shout of merriment.

"And suppos'n that's a gift that nobody wants?" said Mrs. Douglass's sharp eye and voice at once.

"In that case," said the doctor, "I really—Miss Ringgan, may I—a—may I relieve your hand of this fair burden!"

"It is not a very fair burden, sir," said Fleda, laughing and relinquishing her strawberries.

"Ah, but, fair you know, I mean, we speak—in that sense—Mrs. Douglass, here is by far the most elegant offering that your hands will have the honour of receiving this day."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Douglass, "or there won't be much to eat for the minister. Did you never take notice how elegant things somehow make folks grow poor?"

"I guess he'd as leave see something a little substantial," said aunt Syra.

"Well, now," said the doctor, "here is Miss Ringgan, who is unquestionable—a—elegant! and I am sure nobody will say that she—looks poor."

In one sense, surely not! There could not be two opinions. But with all the fairness of health, and the flush which two or three feelings had brought to her cheeks, there was a look as if the workings of the mind had refined away a little of the strength of the physical frame, and as if growing poor in Mrs. Douglass's sense, that is, thin, might easily be the next step.

"What's your uncle going to give us, Fleda?" said aunt Syra.

But Fleda was saved replying; for Mrs. Douglass, who, if she was sharp, could be good-natured, too; and had watched to see how Fleda took the double fire upon elegance and poverty, could bear no more trial of that sweet gentle face. Without giving her time to answer she carried her off to see the things already stored in the closet, bidding the doctor over her shoulder "be off after his goods, whether he had got 'em or no."

There was certainly a promising beginning made for the future minister's comfort. One shelf was already completely stocked with pies, and another shewed a quantity of cake, and biscuits enough to last a good-sized family for several meals.

"That is always the way," said Mrs. Douglass; "it's the strangest thing that folks has no sense! Now one half o' them pies 'll be dried up afore they can eat the rest; 'taint much loss, for Mis' Prim sent 'em down, and if they are worth anything it's the first time anything ever come out of her house that was. Now look at them biscuits!"

"How many are coming to eat them?" said Fleda.

"How?"

"How large a family has the minister?"

"He ha'n't a bit of a family! He ain't married."

"Not!"

At the grave way in which Mrs. Douglass faced round upon her and answered, and at the idea of a single mouth devoted to all that closetful, Fleda's gravity gave place to most uncontrollable merriment.

"No," said Mrs. Douglass, with a curious twist of her mouth but commanding herself, "he ain't to be sure—not yet. He ha'n't any family but himself and some sort of a housekeeper. I suppose they'll divide the house between 'em."

"And the biscuits, I hope," said Fleda. "But what will he do with all the other things, Mrs. Douglass?"

"Sell 'em if he don't want 'em," said Mrs. Douglass quizzically.

People were constantly arriving now, in waggons and on foot; and stores of all kinds were most literally pouring in.

Fleda's attention was taken by a lady and gentleman who had just got out of a vehicle of more than the ordinary pretension and were coming up to the door. The gentleman was young, the lady was not; both had a particularly amiable and pleasant appearance, but about the lady there was something that moved Fleda singularly, and somehow touched the spring of old memories, which she felt stirring at the sight of her. As they neared the house she lost them; then they entered the room and came through it slowly, looking about them with an air of good-humoured amusement. Fleda's eye was fixed but her mind puzzled itself in vain to recover what in her experience had been connected with that fair and lady-like physiognomy and the bland smile that was overlooked by those acute eyes. The eyes met hers, and then seemed to reflect her doubt, for they remained as fixed as her own while the lady quickening her steps came up to her.

"I am sure," she said, holding out her hand, and with a gentle graciousness that was very agreeable, "I am sure you are somebody I know. What is your name?"

"Fleda Ringgan."

"I thought so!" said the lady, now shaking her hand warmly and kissing her, "I knew nobody could have been your mother but Amy Charlton! How like her you look! Don't you know me? Don't you remember Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Mrs. Evelyn!" said Fleda, the whole coming back to her at once.

"You remember me now? How well I recollect you!

and all that old time at Montepoole. Poor little creature that you were! and dear little creature, as I am sure you have been ever since. And how is your dear aunt Lucy?"

Fleda answered that she was well.

"I used to love her very much—that was before I knew you—before she went abroad. *We* have just got home, this spring; and now we are staying at Montepoole for a few days. I shall come and see her to-morrow; I knew you were somewhere in this region, but I did not know exactly where to find you; that was one reason why I came here to-day, I thought I might hear something of you. And where are your aunt Lucy's children? And how are they?"

"Hugh is at home," said Fleda, "and rather delicate; Charlton is in the army."

"In the army? In Mexico?"

"In Mexico he has been——"

"Your poor aunt Lucy!"

"In Mexico he has been, but he is just coming home now; he has been wounded, and he is coming home to spend a long furlough."

"Coming home! That will make you all very happy. And Hugh is delicate; and how are you, love? You hardly look like a country girl. Mr. Olmney!" said Mrs. Evelyn, looking round for her companion, who was standing quietly a few steps off surveying the scene. "Mr. Olmney! I am going to do you a favour, sir, in introducing to you Miss Ringgan—a very old friend of mine. Mr. Olmney, these are not exactly the apple-cheeks and *robustious* demonstrations we are taught to look for in country land?"

This was said with a kind of sly funny enjoyment which took away everything disagreeable from the appeal; but Fleda conceived a favourable opinion of the person to whom it was made from the fact that he paid her no compliment and made no answer beyond a very pleasant smile.

"What is Mrs. Evelyn's definition of a *very old* friend?" said he with another smile, as that lady moved off to take a more particular view of what she had come to see. "To judge by the specimen before me I should consider it very equivocal."

"Perhaps Mrs. Evelyn counts friendship by inheritance," said Fleda. "I think they ought to be counted so."

"'Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not?'" said the young man. Fleda looked up and smiled a pleased answer.

"There is something very lovely in the faithfulness of tried friendship—and very uncommon."

"I know that it is uncommon only by hearsay," said Fleda; "I have so many good friends."

He was silent for an instant, possibly thinking there might be a reason for that unknown only to Fleda herself.

"Perhaps one must be in peculiar circumstances to realise it," he said sighing, "circumstances that leave one of no importance to anyone in the world. But it is a kind lesson! One learns to depend more on the one friendship that can never disappoint."

Fleda's eyes again gave an answer of sympathy, for she thought from the shade that had come upon his face that these circumstances had probably been known to himself.

"This is rather an amusing scene," he remarked presently in a low tone.

"Very," said Fleda. "I have never seen such a one before."

"Nor I," said he. "It is a pleasant scene too; it is pleasant to see so many evidences of kindness and good feeling on the part of all these people."

"There is all the more show of it, I suppose, to-day," said Fleda, "because we have a new minister coming; they want to make a favourable impression."

"Does the old proverb of the 'new broom' hold good here too?" said he, smiling. "What's the name of your new minister?"

"I am not certain," said Fleda, "there were two talked of—the last I heard was that it was an old Mr. Carey; but from what I hear this morning I suppose it must be the other—a Mr. Ollum, or some other queer name, I believe."

Fleda thought her hearer looked very much amused and followed his eye into the room, where Mrs. Evelyn was going about in all quarters looking at everything, and finding occasion to enter into conversation with at least a quarter of the people who were present. Whatever she was saying it seemed at that moment to have something to do with them, for sundry eyes turned in their direction; and presently Dr. Quackenboss came up, with even more than common suavity of manner.

"I trust Miss Ringgan will do me the favour of making me acquainted with—a—our future pastor!" said the doctor, looking however not at all at Miss Ringgan, but straight at the pastor in question. "I have great pleasure in giving you the first welcome, sir, or, I should say, rather the second; since no doubt Miss Ringgan has been in advance of me. It

is not um—a—appropriate, sir, for I may say we—a—divide the town between us. You are, I am sure, a worthy representative of Peter and Paul; and I am—a—a pupil of Esculapius, sir! You are the intellectual physician, and I am the external."

"I hope we shall both prove ourselves good workmen, sir," said the young minister, shaking the doctor's hand heartily.

"This is Dr. Quackenboss, Mr. Olmney," said Fleda, making a tremendous effort. But though she could see corresponding indications about her companion's eyes and mouth, she admired the kindness and self-command with which he listened to the doctor's civilities and answered them; expressing his grateful sense of the favours received from him.

Others now came up; and Mr. Olmney was walked off to be "made acquainted" with all, or with all the chief of his parishioners then and there assembled. Fleda watched him going about shaking hands, talking and smiling in all directions, until Mrs. Evelyn brought him to her again.

"You look just as you used to do," remarked Mrs. Evelyn.

"Do I?" said Fleda, privately thinking that the lady must have good eyes for features of resemblance.

"Except that you have more colour in your cheeks and more sparkles in your eyes. Dear little creature that you were! I want to make you know my children. Do you remember that Mr. and Mrs. Carleton that took such care of you at Montepoole?"

"Certainly, I do! very well."

"We saw them last winter—we were down at their country-place in ——shire. They have a magnificent place there—everything you can think of to make life pleasant. We spent a week with them. My dear Fleda! I wish I could show you that place! you never saw anything like it."

Upon Mr. Olmney's departure with Mrs. Evelyn the attraction which had held the company together was broken, and they scattered fast. Fleda presently finding herself in the minority, was glad to set out with Miss Anastasia Finn and her sister Lucy, who would leave her but very little way from her own door. But she had more company than she bargained for. Dr. Quackenboss was pleased to attach himself to their party, though his own shortest road certainly lay in another direction; and Fleda wondered what he had done with his waggon, which beyond a question must have brought the cheese in the morning. She edged herself out of the conversation as much as possible, and hoped it would prove

so agreeable that he would not think of attending her home. In vain. When they made a stand at the cross roads the doctor stood on her side.

"I hope now you've made a commencement, you will come to see us again, Fleda," said Miss Lucy.

"What's the use of asking?" said her sister abruptly. "If she has a mind to she will, and if she ha'n't I am sure we don't want her."

They turned off.

"Those are excellent people," said the doctor, when they were beyond hearing; "really respectable?"

"Are they?" said Fleda.

"But your goodness does not look, I am sure, to find—a—Parisian graces, in so remote a circle?"

"Certainly not!" said Fleda.

"We have had a genial day!" said the doctor, quitting the Finns.

"I don't know," said Fleda, permitting a little of her inward merriment to work off. "I think it has been rather too hot."

"Yes," said the doctor, "the sun has been ardent; but I referred rather to the—a—to the warming of affections, and the pleasant exchange of intercourse on all sides which has taken place. How do you like our—a—the stranger?"

"Who, sir?"

"The new-comer, this young Mr. Ummin?"

Fleda answered, but she hardly knew what, for she was musing whether the doctor would go away or come in. They reached the door, and Fleda invited him, with terrible effort after her voice; the doctor having just blandly offered an opinion upon the decided polish of Mr. Olmney's manners!

CHAPTER XXIII.

Labour is light where love (quoth I) doth pay;
(Saith he) light burthens heavy, if far borne.—*Drayton.*

FLEDA pushed open the parlour door and preceded her convoy, in a kind of tiptoe state of spirits. The first thing that met her eyes was her aunt in one of the few handsome silks which were almost her sole relic of past wardrobe prosperity, and with a face uncommonly happy and pretty; and the next instant she saw the explanation of this appearance in her cousin Charlton, a little palish, but looking better than she had ever seen him, and another gentleman of whom her eye took in only the general outlines of fashion and comfortable circumstances; now too strange to it to go unnoted. In Fleda's usual mood her next movement would have been made with a demureness that would have looked like bashfulness. But the amusement and pleasure of the day just passed had for the moment set her spirits free from the burden that generally bound them down; and they were as elastic as her step as she came forward and presented to her aunt "Dr. Quackenboss," and then turned to shake her cousin's hand.

"Charlton! Where did you come from? We didn't expect you so soon."

"You are not sorry to see me, I hope?"

"Not at all—very glad;" and then, as her eye glanced towards the other new-comer, Charlton presented to her "Mr. Thorn;" and Fleda's fancy made a sudden and quick leap on the instant to a past incident. And then Dr. Quackenboss was presented, an introduction which Captain Rossitur received coldly, and Mr. Thorn with something more than frigidity.

The doctor's elasticity, however, defied depression, especially in the presence of a silk dress and a military coat. Fleda presently saw that he was agonising her uncle. Mrs. Rossitur had drawn close to her son. Fleda was left to take care of the other visitor. The young men had both seemed more struck at the vision presented to them than she had been on her part. She thought neither of them was very ready to speak to her.

"I did not know," said Mr. Thorn, softly, "what reason I had to thank Rossitur for bringing me home with him

to-night. He promised me a supper and a welcome, but I find he did not tell me the half of my entertainment."

"That was wise in him," said Fleda; "the half that is not expected is always worth a great deal more than the other."

"In this case, most assuredly," said Thorn, bowing, and Fleda was sure not knowing what to make of her.

"Have you been in Mexico, too, Mr. Thorn?"

"Not I. That's an entertainment I beg to decline."

"But you were in the army," said Fleda.

"Yes; it wasn't my doing. There is a time, you know, when one must please the old folks. I grew old enough and wise enough to cut loose from the army before I had gained or lost much by it."

Fleda, rushing into the breakfast-room, astonished Hugh by seizing hold of him and indulging in a most prolonged and unbounded laugh. She did not show herself again till the company came into supper; but then she was found as grave as Minerva. She devoted herself particularly to the care and entertainment of Dr. Quackenboss till he took leave; nor could Thorn get another chance to talk to her through all the evening.

When he and Rossitur were at last in their rooms Fleda told her story.

"You don't know how pleasant it was, aunt Lucy—how much I enjoyed it—seeing and talking to somebody again. Mrs. Evelyn was so very kind."

"I am very glad, my darling," said Mrs. Rossitur, stroking away the hair from the forehead that was bent down towards her; "I am glad you had it to-day, and I am glad you will have it again to-morrow."

"You will have it, too, aunt Lucy. Mrs. Evelyn will be here in the morning—she said so."

"I shall not see her."

"Why? Now, aunt Lucy!—you will."

"I have nothing in the world to see her in—I cannot."

"You have this?"

"For the morning? A rich French silk? It would be absurd. No, no,—it would be better to wear my old merino than that."

"But you will have to dress in the morning for Mr. Thorn?—he will be here to breakfast."

"I shall not come down to breakfast. Don't look so, love! I can't help it."

"And you will not see Mrs. Evelyn and her daughters at all!—and I was thinking that it would do you so much good!"

Mrs. Rossitur drew her face a little nearer and kissed it, over and over.

"It will do you good, my darling; that is what I care for much more."

"It will not do me half as much," said Fleda, sighing.

Her spirits were in their old place again; no more tiptoe to-night. The short light of pleasure was overcast. She went to bed feeling very quiet indeed; and received Mrs. Evelyn and excused her aunt the next day, almost wishing the lady had not been as good as her word. But though in the same mood, she set off with her to drive to Montepoole, it could not stand the bright influences with which she found herself surrounded. She came home again at night with dancing spirits.

It was some days before Captain Rossitur began at all to comprehend the change which had come upon his family. One morning Fleda and Hugh, having finished their morning's work, were in the breakfast room waiting for the rest of the family, when Charlton made his appearance, with the cloud on his brow which had been lately gathering.

"Where is the paper?" said he. "I haven't seen a paper since I have been here."

"You mustn't expect to find Mexican luxuries in Queechy, Captain Rossitur," said Fleda pleasantly. "Look at these roses, and don't ask me for papers!"

He did look a minute at the dish of flowers she was arranging for the breakfast-table, and at the rival freshness and sweetness of the face that hung over them.

"You don't mean to say you live without a paper?"

"Well, it's astonishing how many things people can live without," said Fleda rather dreamily, intent upon settling an uneasy rose that would topple over.

"I wish you'd answer me, really," said Charlton. "Don't you take a paper here?"

"We would take one thankfully if it would be so good as to come; but seriously, Charlton, we haven't any," she said, changing her tone.

"You never looked to see whether I was killed in the meanwhile, I suppose?"

"No—never," said Fleda gravely, as she took her place on a low seat in the corner.

Charlton walked up and down the room for a little while in sullen silence; and then brought up before Fleda.

"What are you doing?"

Fleda looked up, a glance that as sweetly and brightly as possible half asked half bade him be silent and ask no questions.

"What *are* you doing?" he repeated.

"I am putting a patch on my shoe."

His look expressed more indignation than anything else.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," said Fleda, going on with her work.

"What in the name of all the cobblers in the land do you do it for?"

"Because I prefer it to having a hole in my shoe; which would give me the additional trouble of mending my stockings."

Charlton muttered an impatient sentence, of which Fleda only understood that "the devil" was in it, and then desired to know if old shoes would not answer the purpose as well as either holes or patches.

"Quite—if I had them," said Fleda, giving him another glance which with all its gravity and sweetness carried also a little gentle reproach.

"But do you know," said he, after standing still a minute looking at her, "that any cobbler in the country would do what you are doing much better for sixpence?"

"I am quite aware of that," said Fleda, stitching away.

"Your hands are not strong enough for that work!"

Fleda again smiled at him, in the very dint of giving a hard push to her needle; a smile that would have witched him into good humour if he had not been determinately in a cloud and proof against everything. It only admonished him that he could not safely remain in the region of sunbeams; and he walked up and down the room furiously again.

"Are we going to have any breakfast to-day?" said he. "You are very late!"

"No," said Fleda quietly, "it is not time for aunt Lucy to be down yet."

"Don't you have breakfast before nine o'clock?"

"Yes—by half-past eight generally."

"Strange way of getting along on a farm! Well, I can't wait—I promised Thorn I would meet him this morning.—Barby! I wish you would bring me my boots!"

Fleda made two springs, one to touch Charlton's mouth, the other to close the door of communication with the kitchen.

"Well! what is the matter? Can't I have them?"

"Yes, yes; but ask me for what you want. You mustn't call upon Barby in that fashion."

"Why not? Is she too good to be spoken to? What is she in the kitchen for?"

"She wouldn't be in the kitchen long if we were to speak to her in that way," said Fleda. "I suppose she would as soon put your boots on for you as fetch and carry them. I'll see about it."

"It seems to me Fleda rules the house," remarked Captain Rossitur, when she had left the room.

"Well, who should rule it?" said Hugh.

"Not she!"

"I don't think she does," said Hugh; "but if she did, I am sure it could not be in better hands."

"It shouldn't be in her hands at all. But I have noticed since I have been here that she takes the arrangement of almost everything. My mother seems to have nothing to do in her own family."

"I wonder what the family, or anybody in it, would do without Fleda!" said Hugh, his gentle eyes quite firing with indignation. "You had better know more before you speak, Charlton."

"What is there for me to know?"

"Fleda does everything."

"So I say; and that is what I don't like."

"How little you know what you are talking about!" said Hugh. "I can tell you she is the life of the house, almost literally; we should have had little enough to live upon this summer if it had not been for her."

"What do you mean?"—impatiently enough.

"Fleda, if it had not been for her gardening and management. She has taken care of the garden these two years, and sold I can't tell you how much from it. Mr. Sweet, the hotel-man at the Pool, takes all we can give him."

"How much does her 'taking care of the garden' amount to?"

"It amounts to all the planting, and nearly all the other work after the first digging; by far the greater part of it."

Charlton walked up and down a few turns in most unsatisfied silence.

"Humph! And does she get enough when all is done to pay for the trouble?"

"I don't know," said Hugh, rather sadly. "*She* thinks so. It is no trifle."

"Which?—the pay or the trouble?"

"Both. But I meant the pay. Why she made ten dollars last year from the asparagus beds alone, and I don't know how much more this year."

"Ten dollars! The devil!"

"Why?"

"Have you come to counting your dollars by the tens?"

"We have counted our sixpences so a good while," said Hugh quietly.

Charlton strode about the room again in much perturbation. Then came in Fleda, looking as bright as if dollars had been counted by the thousand and bearing his boots.

"What on earth did you do that for?" said he angrily. "I could have gone for them myself."

"No harm done," said Fleda lightly, "only I have got something else instead of the thanks I expected."

"I can't conceive," said he, sitting down and sulkily drawing on his foot-gear, "why this piece of punctiliousness should have made any more difficulty about bringing me my boots than about blacking them."

A sly glance of intelligence, which Charlton was quick enough to detect, passed between Fleda and Hugh. His eye carried its question from one to the other. Fleda's gravity gave way.

"Don't look at me so, Charlton," said she, laughing. "I can't help it, you are so excessively comical! I recommend that you go out upon the grass-plat before the door and turn round two or three times."

"Will you have the goodness to explain yourself? Who *did* black these boots?"

"Never pry into the secrets of families," said Fleda. "Hugh and I have a couple of convenient little fairies in our service that do things *unknownst*."

"I blacked them, Charlton," said Hugh.

Captain Rossitur gave his slippers a fling that carried them clean into the corner of the room.

"I will see," he said, rising, "whether some other service cannot be had more satisfactory than that of fairies!"

"Now, Charlton," said Fleda, with a sudden change of manner, coming to him and laying her hand most gently on his arm, "please don't speak about these things before uncle Rolf or your mother—please do not! —Charlton? It would only do a great deal of harm and do no good."

She looked up in his face, but he would not meet her pleading eye, and shook off her hand.

"I don't need to be instructed how to speak to my father and mother; and I am not one of the household that has submitted itself to your direction."

Fleda sat down on her bench and was quiet, but with a lip that trembled a little and eyes that let fall one or two witnesses against him. Charlton did not see them, and he knew better than to meet Hugh's look of reproach. When breakfast was over, Charlton was left alone with his mother.

"Mother," said Charlton, "what is all this about the mill and the farm? Is not the farm doing well?"

"I am afraid not very well," said Mrs. Rossitur gently.

"And have you really nothing to depend upon but that child's strawberries and Hugh's wood-saw?" he said, in the tone he ought to have used from the beginning.

"Little else."

Charlton stifled two or three sentences that rose to his lips, and began to walk up and down the room again. His mother sat musing by the teaboard still, softly clinking her spoon against the edge of her tea-cup.

"She has grown up very pretty," he remarked after a pause.

"Pretty!" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Why?"

"No one that has seen much of Fleda would ever describe her by that name."

Charlton had the candour to think that he had seen something of her that morning.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Rossitur sadly; "I can't bear to think of her spending her life as she is doing—wearing herself out, I know, sometimes—and buried alive."

"Buried!" said Charlton in his turn.

"Yes—without any of the advantages and opportunities she ought to have. I can't bear to think of it. And yet how should I ever live without her!" said Mrs. Rossitur, leaning her face upon her hands. "And if she were known she would not be mine long. But it grieves me to have her go without her music that she is so fond of, and the books she wants; she and Hugh have gone from end to end of every volume there is in the house, I believe, in every language except Greek."

"Well, she looks pretty happy and contented, mother."

"I don't know!" said Mrs. Rossitur, shaking her head.

"Isn't she happy?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Rossitur again; "she has a spirit that is happy in doing her duty, or anything for those she loves; but I see her sometimes wearing a look that pains me exceedingly. I am afraid the way she lives and the changes in our affairs have worn upon her more than we know of; she feels doubly everything that touches me, or Hugh, or your father. She is a gentle spirit!"

"She seems to me not to want character," said Charlton.

"Character! I don't know who has so much. She has at least fifty times as much character as I have. And energy. She is admirable at managing people; she knows how to influence them somehow so that everybody does what she wants."

"And who influences her?" said Charlton.

"Who influences her? Everybody that she loves. Who has the most influence over her, do you mean? I am sure I don't know; Hugh if anybody; but *she* is rather the moving spirit of the household.

Captain Rossitur resolved that he would be an exception to her rule.

He forgot, however, for some reason or other, to sound his father any more on the subject of mismanagement. His thoughts indeed were more pleasantly taken up.

CHAPTER XXIV.

My lord Sebastian,
The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness
And time to speak it in: you rub the sore
When you should bring the plaster.—*Tempest.*

THE Evelyns spent several weeks at the Pool; and both mother and daughters conceiving a great affection for Fleda, kept her in their company as much as possible. For those weeks Fleda had enough of gaiety. And even Mrs. Rossitur

was persuaded, more times than one, to put herself in her plainest remaining French silk and entertain the whole party, with the addition of one or two of Charlton's friends, at her Queechy farm-house.

Fleda enjoyed it all with the quick spring of a mind habitually bent to the patient fulfilment of duty and habitually under the pressure of rather sobering thoughts. It was a needed and very useful refreshment. Charlton's being at home gave her the full good of the opportunity more than would else have been possible. He was her constant attendant, driving her to and from the Pool, and finding as much to call him there as she had, for besides the Evelyns, his friend Thorn abode there all this time. The only drawback to Fleda's pleasure as she drove off from Queechy would be the leaving Hugh plodding away at his saw-mill.

But the Evelyns and Thorn and everybody else whom they knew left the Pool at last, before Charlton, who was sufficiently well again, had near run out his furlough; and then the cloud which had only shewed itself by turns during all those weeks, gathered and settled determinately upon his brow.

He had long ago supplied the want of a newspaper. One evening in September the family were sitting in the room where they had had tea, for the benefit of the fire, when Barby pushed open the door and came in.

"Fleda, will you let me have one of the last papers? I've a notion to look at it."

Fleda rose and went to rummaging in the cupboards.

"You can have it again in a little while," said Barby considerately.

The paper was found, and Miss Elster went out with it.

"What an unendurable piece of ill-manners that woman is," said Charlton.

"She has no idea of being ill-mannered, I assure you," said Fleda.

His voice was like a brewing storm; hers was so clear and soft that it made a lull in spite of him. But he began again.

"There is no necessity for submitting to impertinence. I never would do it."

"I have no doubt you never will," said his father; "unless you can't help yourself."

"Is there any good reason, sir, why you should not have proper servants in the house?"

"A very good reason," said Mr. Rossitur. "Fleda would be in despair."

"Is there none beside that?" said Charlton drily.

"None—except a trifling one," Mr. Rossitur answered in the same tone.

"We cannot afford it, dear Charlton," said his mother softly.

There was a silence, during which Fleda moralised on the ways people take to make themselves uncomfortable.

"Does that man—to whom you let the farm—does he do his duty?"

"I am not the keeper of his conscience."

"I am afraid it would be a small charge to any one," said Fleda.

"But are you the keeper of the gains you ought to have from him? Does he deal fairly by you?"

"May I ask first what interest it is of yours?"

"It is my interest, sir, because I come home and find the family living upon the exertions of Hugh and Fleda, and find them growing thin and pale under it."

"You, at least, are free from all pains of the kind, Captain Rossitur."

"Don't listen to him, uncle Rolf!" said Fleda, going round to her uncle and making as she passed a most warning impression upon Charlton's arm; "don't mind what he says; that young gentleman has been among the Mexican ladies till he has lost an eye for a really proper complexion. Look at me! Do I look pale and thin. Uncle, don't listen to him! he hasn't been in a decent humour since the Evelyns went away."

She knelt down before him and laid her hands upon his and looked up in his face to bring all her plea; the plea of most winning sweetness of entreaty in features yet flushed and trembling. His own did not unbend as he gazed at her, but he gave her a silent answer in the pressure of the hands that went straight from his heart to hers. Fleda's eyes turned to Charlton appealingly.

"Is it necessary," he repeated, "that that child and this boy should spend their days in labour to keep the family alive?"

"If it were," replied Mr. Rossitur, "I am very willing that their exertions should cease. For my own part, I would quite as lief be out of the world as in it."

"Charlton! how can you?" said Fleda, half beside herself. "You should know of what you speak or be silent! Uncle, don't mind: he is talking wildly—my work does me good."

"You do not understand yourself," said Charlton obstinately.

"It is more than you ought to do, and I know my mother thinks so too."

"Well!" said Mr. Rossitur, "it seems there is an agreement in my own family to bring me to the bar—get up, Fleda, let us hear all the charges to be brought against me, at once, and then pass sentence. What have your mother and you agreed upon, Charlton?—go on!"

Mrs. Rossitur, now beyond speech, left the room, weeping even aloud. Hugh followed her. Fleda wrestled with her agitation for a minute or two, and then got up and put both arms round her uncle's neck.

"Don't talk so, dear uncle Rolf!—you make us very unhappy—aunt Lucy did not mean any such thing—it is only Charlton's nonsense. Do go and tell her you don't think so; you have broken her heart by what you said; do go, uncle Rolf! do go and make her happy again! Forget it all! Charlton did not know what he was saying. Won't you go, dear uncle Rolf?"

The words were spoken between a burst of tears that utterly overcame her, though they did not hinder the utmost caressingness of manner. Mr. Rossitur stood like a man that did not care what happened or what became of him; dumb and unrelenting; suffering her sweet words and imploring tears, with no attempt to answer the one or stay the other. But he could not hold out against her beseeching. He was no match for it. He returned at last heartily the pressure of her arms, and unable to give her any other answer, kissed her two or three times such kisses as are charged with the heart's whole message; and disengaging himself left the room.

For a minute after he was gone Fleda cried excessively; and Charlton, now alone with her, felt as if he had not a particle of self-respect left to stand upon. One such agony would do her more harm than whole weeks of labour and weariness. He was too vexed and ashamed of himself to be able to utter a word, but when she recovered a little and was leaving the room, he stood still by the door in an attitude that seemed to ask her to speak a word to him.

"I am sure, Charlton," she said gently, "you will be sorry to-morrow for what you have done."

"I am sorry now," he said. But she passed out without saying anything more.

Captain Rossitur passed the night in unmitigated vexation with himself. But his repentance could not have been very

genuine, since his most painful thought was what Fleda must think of him!

He was somewhat reassured at breakfast to find no traces of the evening's storm; indeed, the moral atmosphere seemed rather clearer and purer than common. His own face was the only one which had an unusual shade upon it. There was no difference in anybody's manner towards himself; and there was even a particularly gentle and kind pleasantness about Fleda, intended, he knew, to soothe and put to rest any movings of self-reproach he might feel. It somehow missed of its aim and made him feel worse; and after on his part a very silent meal he quitted the house and took himself and his discontent to the woods.

Whatever effect they had upon him, it was the middle of the morning before he came back again. He found Fleda alone in the breakfast-room sewing.

"Who are you making shirts for?" said Charlton.

"Hugh."

"You do everything for Hugh, don't you?"

"Little enough. Not half so much as he does for me."

"Is he up at the mill to-day?"

"He is always there," said Fleda, sighing. There was another silence.

"Charlton," said Fleda, looking up with a face of the loveliest insinuation, "isn't there something *you* might do to help us a little?"

"I will help you garden, Fleda, with pleasure."

"I would rather you should help somebody else," said she, still looking at him.

"What, Hugh? You would have me go and work at the mill for him, I suppose!"

"Don't be angry with me, Charlton, for suggesting it," said Fleda, looking down again.

"Angry!" said he. "But is that what you would have me do?"

"Not unless you like—I didn't know but you might take his place once in a while for a little, to give him a rest——"

"And suppose some of the people from Montepoole that know me should come by? What are you thinking of?" said he in a tone that certainly justified Fleda's deprecation.

"Well!" said Fleda, in a kind of choked voice, "there is a strange rule of honour in vogue in the world!"

"Why should I help Hugh rather than anybody else?"

"He is killing himself!" said Fleda, letting her work fall

and hardly speaking the words through thick tears. Her head was down and they came fast. Charlton stood abashed for a minute.

"You shan't do so, Fleda," said he gently, endeavouring to raise her,—"you have tired yourself with this miserable work! Come to the window; you have got low-spirited, but I am sure without reason about Hugh,—but you shall set me about what you will. You are right, I dare say, and I am wrong; but don't make me think myself a brute, and I will do anything you please."

He had raised her up and made her lean upon him. Fleda wiped her eyes and tried to smile.

"I will do anything that will please you, Fleda."

"It is not to please *me*," she answered meekly.

"I would not have spoken a word last night if I had known it would have grieved you so."

"I am sorry you should have none but so poor a reason for doing right," said Fleda gently.

"Upon my word, I think you are about as good reason as anybody need have," said Charlton.

She put her hand upon his arm and looked up—such a look of pure rebuke as carried to his mind the full force of the words she did not speak,—"Who art thou that carest for a worm which shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" Charlton's eyes fell. Fleda turned gently away and began to mend the fire. He stood watching her for a little.

"What do you think of me, Fleda?" he said at length.

"A little wrong-headed," answered Fleda, giving him a glance and a smile. "I don't think you are very bad."

CHAPTER XXV.

I dinna ken what I should want
If I could get but a man.—*Scotch Ballad.*

CAPTAIN ROSSITUR did no work at the saw-mill. But Fleda's words had not fallen to the ground. He began to look to his gun; and from that time so long as he stayed the table was plentifully supplied with all kinds of game the season and the country could furnish. Wild ducks and partridges banished pork and bacon even from memory; and Fleda joyfully declared she would not see another omelette again till she was in distress.

While Charlton was still at home came a very urgent invitation from Mrs. Evelyn that Fleda should pay them a long visit in New York, bidding her care for no want of preparation, but come and make it there. Fleda demurred, however, on that very score. But before her answer was written, another missive came from Dr. Gregory, not asking so much as demanding her presence, and enclosing a fifty dollar bill, for which he said he would hold her responsible till she had paid him with —not her own hands—but her own lips. There was no withstanding the manner of this entreaty. Fleda packed up some of Mrs. Rossitur's laid-by silks, to be refreshed with an air of fashion, and set off with Charlton at the end of his furlough.

To her simple spirit of enjoyment the weeks ran fast; and all manner of novelties and kindnesses helped them on. It was a time of cloudless pleasure. But those she had left thought it long. She wrote them how delightfully she kept house for the old doctor, whose wife had long been dead, and how joyously she and the Evelyns made time fly. And every pleasure she felt awoke almost as strong a throb in the hearts at home. But they missed her, and she was most dearly welcomed when she came back. It was just before New Year.

For half an hour there was most gladsome use of eyes and tongues. Fleda had a great deal to tell them.

"How well—how well you are looking, dear Fleda!" said her aunt for the third or fourth time.

"That's more than I can say for you and Hugh, aunt Lucy. But where's uncle Rolf?"

"He is gone to look after those lands in Michigan."

"In Michigan! When did he go?"

"Very soon after you."

"And you didn't let me know! Oh, why didn't you? How lonely you must have been!"

"Let you know indeed!" said Mrs. Rossitur, wrapping her in her arms. "Hugh and I counted every week that you stayed with more and more pleasure each one."

"I understand!" said Fleda, laughing under her aunt's kisses. "Well, I am glad I am at home again to take care of you. I see you can't get along without me!"

"People have been very kind, Fleda," said Hugh.

"Have they?"

"Yes, thinking we were desolate, I suppose. There has been no end to aunt Miriam's goodness and pleasantness."

"Oh, aunt Miriam, always!" said Fleda; "and Seth."

"Catharine Douglass has been up twice to ask if her mother could do anything for us; and Mrs. Douglass sent us once a rabbit and once a quantity of wild pigeons that Earl had shot. Mother and I lived upon pigeons for I don't know how long. Barby wouldn't eat 'em—she said she liked pork better; but I believe she did it on purpose."

"Like enough," said Fleda, smiling from her aunt's arms where she still lay.

"And Seth has sent you plenty of your favourite hickory-nuts, very fine ones; and I gathered butternuts enough for you near home."

"Everything is for me," said Fleda. "Well, the first thing I do shall be to make some butternut candy for *you*. You won't despise that, Mr. Hugh?"

Hugh smiled at her and went on—

"And your friend, Mr. Olmney, has sent us a corn-basket full of the superbest apples you ever saw. He has one tree of the finest in Queechy, he says."

"*My* friend," said Fleda, colouring a little.

"Well, I don't know whose he is if he isn't yours," said Hugh. "And even the Finns sent us some fish that their brother had caught, because, they said, they had more than they wanted. And Dr. Quackenboss sent us a goose and a turkey. We didn't like to keep them, but we were afraid if we sent them back it would not be understood."

"Send them back!" said Fleda. "That would never do! All Queechy would have rung with it."

"Well, we didn't," said Hugh. "But so we sent one of them to Barby's old mother for Christmas."

"Poor Dr. Quackenboss!" said Fleda. "That man has as

near as possible killed me two or three times. As for the others, they are certainly the oddest of all the finny tribes. I must go out and see Barby for a minute."

It was a good many minutes, however, before she could get free to do any such thing.

"You ain't lost no flesh," said Barby, shaking hands with her anew. "What did they think of Queechy keep down in York?"

"I don't know, I didn't ask them," said Fleda. "How goes the world with you, Barby?"

"I'm mighty glad you are come home, Fleda," said Barby, lowering her voice.

"Why?" said Fleda, in a like tone.

"I've been all but at my wit's end; for you know Mis' Rossitur ain't no hand about anything—I couldn't say a word to her; and ever since he went away we have been just winding ourselves up. I thought I should clear out, when Mis' Rossitur said maybe you wa'n't a coming till next week."

"But what is it, Barby? what is wrong?"

"There ha'n't been anything right, to my notions, for a long spell," said Barby, wringing out her dish-cloth hard and flinging it down to give herself uninterruptedly to talk; "but now you see Didenhover nor none of the men never comes near the house to do a chore; and there ain't wood to last three days; andHugh ain't fit to cut it if it was piled up in the yard; and there ain't the first stick of it out of the woods yet."

Fleda sat down and looked very thoughtfully into the fire.

"He had ought to ha' seen to it afore he went away, but he ha'n't done it, and there it is."

"Why, who takes care of the cows?" said Fleda.

"Oh, never mind the cows," said Barby; "they ain't suffering; I wish we was as well off as they be; but I guess when he went away he made a hole in our pockets for to mend his'n. I don't say he hadn't ought to ha' done it, but we've been pretty short ever sen, Fleda; we're in the last bushel of flour, and there ain't but a handful of corn meal, and mighty little sugar, white or brown. I did say something to Mis' Rossitur, but all the good it did was to spile her appetite, I s'pose; and if there's grain in the floor there ain't nobody to carry it to mill, nor to thrash it, nor a team to draw it, fur's I know."

"Hugh cannot cut wood!" said Fleda; "nor drive to mill either, in this weather."

"I could go to mill," said Barby, "now you're to hum, but that's only the beginning; and it's no use to try to do everything—flesh and blood must stop somewhere."

"No indeed!" said Fleda. "We must have somebody immediately."

"That's what I had fixed upon," said Barby. "If you could get hold of some young feller that w'an't so up with an idee that he was a grown man and too big to be told, I'd just clap to and fix that little room upstairs for him and give him his victuals here, and we'd have some good of him; instead o' having him streakin' off just at the minute when he'd ought to be along."

"Who is there we could get, Barby?"

"I don't know," said Barby; "but they say there is never a nick that there ain't a jog some place; so I guess it can be made out. I'll tell you who does; that is, if there *is* anybody, Mis' Douglass. She keeps hold of one end of 'most everybody's affairs, I tell her. Anyhow, she's a good hand to go to."

"I'll go there at once," said Fleda.

There was no doing anything that day, but the very next afternoon Fleda and Hugh walked down through the snow to Mrs. Douglass's.

"Why, 'tain't you, is it?" she said, when she opened the door. "Catharine said it was, and I said I guessed it wa'n't, for I reckoned you had made up your mind not to come and see me at all. How do you do?"

The last sentence in the tone of hearty and earnest hospitality. Fleda made her excuses.

"Ay, ay! I can understand all that just as well as if you said it. I know how much it means too. Take off your hat."

Fleda said she could not stay, and explained her business. She was presently rewarded with the promise of the very person she wanted—a boy, or young man, then in Earl Douglass's employ; but his wife said "she guessed he'd give him up to her"; and what his wife said, Fleda knew, Earl Douglass was in the habit of making good.

"There ain't enough to do to keep him busy," said Mrs. Douglass. "I told Earl he made me more work than he saved; but he's hung on till now."

"What sort of a boy is he, Mrs. Douglass?"

"He ain't a steel trap, I tell you beforehand," said the lady, with one of her sharp intelligent glances; "he don't know which way to go till you show him; but he's a clever

enough kind of a chap, he don't mean no harm. I guess he'll do for what you want."

"Is he to be trusted?"

"Trust him with anything but a knife and fork," said she, with another look and shake of the head. "He has no idea but what everything on the supper-table is meant to be eaten straight off. I would keep two such men as my husband as soon as I would Philetus."

Mr. Douglass readily agreed to the transfer of Philetus's services.

"He's a good boy!" said Earl, "he's a good boy; he's as good a kind of a boy as you need to have. He wants tellin'; most boys want tellin'; but he'll do when he *is* told, and he means to do right."

CHAPTER XXVI.

'Tis merry, 'tis merry, in good green wood,
So blithe Lady Alice is singing;
On the beech's pride, and the oak's brown side,
Lord Richard's axe is ringing.—*Lady of the Lake.*

PHILETUS came, and was inducted into office and the little room immediately; and Fleda felt herself eased of a burthen. Barby reported him stout and willing, and he proved it by what seemed a perverted inclination for bearing the most enormous logs of wood he could find into the kitchen.

"He will hurt himself," said Fleda.

"I'll protect him against anything but buckwheat batter," said Barby, with a grave shake of her head. "Lazy folks take the most pains, I tell him. But it would be good to have some more ground, Fleda, for Philetus says he don't care for dinner when he has griddles to breakfast, and there ain't anything much cheaper than that."

"Aunt Lucy, have you any change in the house?" said Fleda that same day.

"There isn't but three and sixpence," said Mrs. Rossitur, with a pained conscious look. "What is wanting, dear?"

"Only candles; Barby has suddenly found we are out, and she won't have any more made before to-morrow. Never mind!"

"There is only that," repeated Mrs. Rossitur. "Hugh has a little money due to him from last summer, but he hasn't been able to get it yet. You may take that, dear."

"No," said Fleda, "we mustn't. We might want it more."

"We can sit in the dark for once," said Hugh, "and try to make an uncommon display of what Dr. Quackenboss calls 'sociality.'"

"No," said Fleda, who had stood busily thinking, "I am going to send Philetus down to the post-office for the paper, and when it comes I am not to be balked of reading it—I've made up my mind! We'll go right off into the woods and get some pine knots, Hugh—come! They make a lovely light. You get us a couple of baskets and the hatchet—I wish we had two—and I'll be ready in no time. That'll do!"

It is to be noticed that Charlton had provided against any future deficiency of news in his family. Fleda skipped away, and in five minutes returned arrayed for the expedition. She and Hugh set forth, lingering awhile however to give a new edge to their hatchet, Fleda turning the grindstone. They mounted then the apple-orchard hill and went a little distance along the edge of the table-land before striking off into the woods. They had stood still a minute to look over the little white valley to the snow-dressed woodland beyond.

"This is better than New York, Hugh," said Fleda.

"I am very glad to hear you say that," said another voice. Fleda turned and started a little to see Mr. Olmney at her side.

"Mrs. Rossitur told me where you had gone and gave me permission to follow you, but I hardly hoped to overtake you so soon."

"We stopped to sharpen our tools," said Fleda. "We are out on a foraging expedition."

"Will you let me help you?"

"Certainly! if you understand the business. Do you know a pine knot when you see it?"

He laughed and shook his head, but avowed a wish to learn.

"Well, it would be a charity to teach you anything wholesome," said Fleda, "for I heard one of Mr. Olmney's friends

lately saying that he looked like a person who was in danger of committing suicide."

"Suicide! One of my friends!" he exclaimed in the utmost astonishment.

"Yes," said Fleda, laughing; "and there is nothing like the open air for clearing away vapours."

"You cannot have known that by experience," said he, looking at her.

Fleda shook her head and advising him to take nothing for granted, set off into the woods.

They went gaily on, careering about in all directions and bearing down upon every promising stump or dead pine tree they saw in the distance. Hugh and Mr. Olmney took turns in the labour of hewing out the fat pine knots and splitting down the old stumps to get at the pitchy heart of the wood; and the baskets began to grow heavy. The whole party were in excellent spirits, and as happy as the birds that filled the woods and whose cheery "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" was heard whenever they paused to rest and let the hatchet be still.

"How one sees everything in the colour of one's own spectacles," said Fleda.

"May I ask what colour yours are to-day?" said Mr. Olmney.

"Rose, I think," said Hugh.

"No," said Fleda, "they are better than that—they are no worse colour than the snow's own—they shew me everything just as it is. It could not be lovelier."

"I should hardly think," said he softly, "that you were looking through white spectacles, if you had not told us so."

"Oh—a shade may come over what one is looking at, you know," said Fleda. But seeing that he still watched her inquiringly, she added:

"I do not think a very wide landscape is ever gay in its effect upon the mind—do you?"

"Perhaps—I do not know," said he, his eyes turning to it again as if to try what the effect was.

"My thoughts had gone back," said Fleda, "to a time a good while ago, when I was a child and stood here in summer weather—and I was thinking that the change in the landscape is something like that which years make in the mind."

"But you have not, for a long time at least, known any very acute sorrow?"

"No," said Fleda, "but that is not necessary. There is

a gentle kind of discipline which does its work I think more surely."

"Thank God for *gentle* discipline!" said Mr. Olmney; "if you do not know what those griefs are that break down mind and body together."

"I am not unthankful, I hope, for anything," said Fleda gently; "but I have been apt to think that after a crushing sorrow the mind may rise up again, but that a long-continued though much lesser pressure in time breaks up the spring."

He looked at her again with a mixture of incredulous and tender interest, but her face did not belie her words, strange as they sounded from so young and in general so bright-seeming a creature.

"There shall no evil happen to the just," he said presently and with great sympathy.

Fleda flashed a look of gratitude at him—it was no more, for she felt her eyes watering and turned them away.

"You have not, I trust, heard any bad news?"

"No, sir—not at all!"

"I beg pardon for asking, but Mrs. Rossitur seemed to be in less good spirits than usual."

He had some reason to say so, having found her in a violent fit of weeping.

"You do not need to be told," he went on, "of the need there is that a cloud should now and then come over this lower scene—the danger that if it did not our eyes would look nowhere else?"

There is something very touching in hearing a kind voice say what one has often struggled to say to oneself.

"I know it, sir," said Fleda, her words a little choked, "and one may not wish the cloud away, but it does not the less cast a shade upon the face."

The baskets being now sufficiently heavy and arms pretty well tired, they left the further riches of the pine woods, unexplored and walked sagely homewards. At the brow of the table-land Mr. Olmney left them to take a shorter cut to the high-road, having a visit to make which the shortening day warned him not to defer.

"Put down your basket and rest a minute, Hugh," said Fleda. "I had a world of things to talk to you about, and this blessed man has driven them all out of my head."

"But you are not sorry he came along with us?"

"Oh no. We had a very good time."

"By the way, Hugh, when in New York, I took your advice."

"About what?" said Hugh.

"I carried down some of my scribblings and sent them to a magazine."

"Did you!" said Hugh, looking delighted. "And will they publish them?"

"I don't know," said Fleda, "that's another matter. I sent them, or uncle Orrin did, when I first went down; and I have heard nothing of them yet."

"And if they take them, do you expect they will give anything for them?—the magazine people?"

"I am sure if they don't they shall have no more—that is my only possible inducement to let them be printed. For my own pleasure, I would far rather not."

"Did you sign with your own name?"

"My own name? Yes, and desired it to be printed in large capitals. What are you thinking of? No—I hope you'll forgive me, but I signed myself what our friend the doctor calls 'Yugh.'"

"I'll forgive you if you'll do one thing for me."

"What?"

"Shew me all you have in your portfolio—do, Fleda—to-night by the light of the pitch-pine knots. Why shouldn't you give me that pleasure?"

"Well," said Fleda with a face that to Hugh was extremely satisfactory, "we'll see—I suppose you might as well read my productions in manuscript as in print. Suppose we try to get home with these baskets."

Which they did.

Tea was ready, and only waiting for Mrs. Rossitur to come downstairs, when Fleda, whose eye was carelessly running along the columns of the paper, uttered a sudden shout and covered her face with it. Hugh looked up in astonishment, but Fleda was beyond anything but exclamations, laughing and flushing to the very roots of her hair.

"What *is* the matter, Fleda?"

"Why," said Fleda, "how comical! I was just looking over the list of articles in the January number of the 'Excelsior'—"

"The 'Excelsior'?" said Hugh.

"Yes—the magazine I sent my things to—I was running over their advertisement here, where they give a special puff of the publication in general and of several things in particular,

and I saw—here they speak of 'A tale of thrilling interest by Mrs. Eliza Lothbury, unsurpassed,' and so forth and so forth; 'another valuable communication from Mr. Charleston, whose first acute and discriminating paper all our readers will remember;' 'the beginning of a new tale from the infallibly graceful pen of Mrs. Deila Lawriston; we are sure it will be,' so and so; '"*The wind's voices*," *by our new correspondent*, "*Hugh*," *has a delicate sweetness that would do no discredit to some of our most honoured names!*' What do you think of that?"

What Hugh thought he did not say, but he looked delighted, and came to read the grateful words for himself.

"I did not know but they had declined it utterly," said Fleda, "it was so long since I had sent it and they had taken no notice of it; but it seems they kept it for the beginning of a new volume."

"'Would do no discredit to some of our most honoured names!'" said Hugh. "Dear Fleda, I am very glad! But it is no more than I expected."

"Expected!" said Fleda. "When you had not seen a line! Hush—my dear Hugh, aren't you hungry?"

The tea, with this spice to their appetites, was wonderfully relished; and Hugh and Fleda kept making despatches of secret pleasure and sympathy to each other's eyes; though Fleda's face after the first flush had faded was perhaps rather quieter than usual. Hugh's was illuminated.

"Mr. Skillcorn is a smart man!" said Barby coming in with a package, "he has made out to go two miles in two hours and get back again safe!"

"More from the post-office!" exclaimed Fleda pouncing upon it, "Oh yes, there has been another mail. A letter for you, aunt Lucy! from uncle Rolf! We'll forgive him, Barby—and here's a letter for me from uncle Orrin, and—yes—the 'Excelsior.' Hugh, uncle Orrin said he would send it. Now for these blessed pine knots! Aunt Lucy, you shall be honoured with the one whole candle the house contains."

The table soon cleared away, the basket of fat fuel was brought in; and one or two splinters being delicately insinuated between the sticks on the fire a very brilliant illumination sprang out. Fleda sent a congratulatory look over to Hugh on the other side of the fireplace as she cosily established herself on her little bench at one corner with her letter; he had the magazine. Mrs. Rossitur between them at the table with her one candle was already insensible to all outward things.

Hugh was beginning "The wind's voices," for the third time, when a soft-whispered "Hugh!" across the fire made him look over to Fleda's corner. She was holding up with both hands a five-dollar bank note and just shewing him her eyes over it.

"What's that?" said Hugh in an energetic whisper.

"I don't know!" said Fleda shaking her head comically; "I am told 'The wind's voices' have blown it here, but privately I am afraid it is a windfall of another kind."

"What?" said Hugh, laughing.

"Uncle Orrin says it is the first fruits of what I sent to the 'Excelsior,' and that more will come; but I do not feel at all sure that it is entirely the growth of that soil."

"I dare say it is," said Hugh; "I am sure it is worth more than that. Dear Fleda, I like it so much!"

Fleda gave him such a smile of grateful affection; not at all as if she deserved his praise but as if it was very pleasant to have.

"What does father say, mother?"

In answer to this they had the letter read, which indeed contained nothing remarkable beyond its strong expressions of affection to each one of the little family; a cordial which Mrs. Rossitur drank and grew strong upon in the very act of reading. Then, having folded up her treasure and talked a little while about it, Mrs. Rossitur caught up the magazine like a person who had been famished in that kind; and soon she and it and her tallow candle formed a trio apart from all the world again. At last, however, she flung the magazine from her and turning from the table sat looking into the fire with a rather uncommonly careful and unsatisfied brow.

"What did you think of the second piece of poetry there, mother?" said Hugh; "that ballad? 'The wind's voices,' it is called."

"'The wind's voices?' I don't know—I didn't read it, I believe."

"Why mother! I liked it very much. Do read it—read it aloud."

Mrs. Rossitur took up the magazine again abstractedly, and read it.

"Well, mother, how do you like it?" said Hugh, whose eyes gave tender witness to *his* liking for it.

"It is pretty," said Mrs. Rossitur.

Hugh exclaimed, and Fleda laughing took it out of her hand.

"Why, mother!" said Hugh, "it is Fleda's."

"Fleda's!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossitur, snatching the magazine again. "My dear child, I was not thinking in the least of what I was reading. Fleda's!"

She read it over anew, with swimming eyes this time, and then clasped Fleda in her arms and gave her, not words, but the better reward of kisses and tears. They remained so a long time, even till Hugh left them; and then Fleda released from her aunt's embrace still crouched by her side with one arm in her lap.

They both sat thoughtfully looking into the fire till it had burnt itself out, and nothing but a glowing bed of coals remained.

CHAPTER XXVII.

If I become not a cart as well as another man, a plague on my bringing up.—*Shakespeare.*

EVERY day could not be as bright as the last, even by the help of pitch-pine knots. They blazed indeed many a time, but the blaze shone upon faces that it could not sometimes light up. Matters drew gradually within a smaller and smaller compass. Another five dollars came from uncle Orrin, and the hope of more; but these were carefully laid by to pay Philetus; and for all other wants of the household, excepting those the farm supplied, the family were dependent on mere driblets of sums. None came from Mr. Rossitur. Hugh managed to collect a very little. That kept them from absolute distress; that, and Fleda's delicate instrumentality. Regular dinners were given up, fresh meat being now unheard-of, unless when a kind neighbour made them a present; and appetite would have lagged sadly but for Fleda's untiring care. She thought no time nor pains ill-bestowed which could prevent her aunt and Hugh from feeling the want of old comforts; and her

nicest skill was displayed in varying the combinations of their very few and simple stores. The diversity and deliciousness of her bread-stuffs, Barby said, was "beyond everything!" and a cup of rich coffee was found to cover all deficiencies of removes and entremêts; and this was always served, Barby said further, as if the President of the United States was expected. Fleda never permitted the least slackness in the manner of doing this or anything else that she could control.

"I wish Philetus would make his appearance with the cows," said Fleda; "it is a very odd thing that they should be gone since yesterday morning, and no news of them."

"I only hope the snow ain't so bright it'll blind his eyes," said Barby.

"There he is this minute," said Hugh. "It is impossible to tell from his countenance whether successful or not."

"Well, where are the cows, Mr. Skillcorn?" said Barby, as he came in.

"I have went all over town," said the person addressed, "and they ain't no place."

"Have you asked news of them, Philetus?"

"I have asked the hull town, and I have went all over, 'til I was a'most beat out with the cold, and I han't seen the first sight of 'em yet!"

Fleda and Hugh exchanged looks, while Barby and Mr. Skillcorn entered into an animated discussion of probabilities and impossibilities.

"Didenhover's cleared out," Philetus burst forth at length abruptly.

"What!" said Fleda and Barby at once, the broom and the biscuits standing still.

"Mr. Didenhover."

"What of him?"

"He has tuk himself off out o' town."

"Where to?"

"I can't tell where teu, he ain't coming back, 'tain't likely."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause he's tuk all his traps and went, and he said farming didn't pay and he wa'n't a going to have nothin' more to deu with it; he telled Mis' Simpson so, he lived to Mis' Simpson's; and she telled Mr. Ten Eyck."

"Are you sure, Philetus?"

"Sure as 'lection! He telled Miss Simpson so, and she telled Mr. Ten Eyck; and he's cleared out."

Fleda and Hugh again looked at each other. Mr. Skillcorn

having now delivered himself of his news went out to the wood-yard.

"I hope he ha'n't carried off our cows along with him," said Barby, as she too went out to some other part of her premises.

"He was to have made us quite a payment on the first of March," said Fleda.

"Yes, and that was to have gone to uncle Orrin," said Hugh.

"We shall not see a cent of it. And we wanted a little of it for ourselves. I have that money from the 'Excelsior,' but I can't touch a penny of it, for it must go to Philetus's wages. What Barby does without hers, I do not know, she has had but one five dollars in six months. Why she stays I cannot imagine; unless it is for pure love."

"As soon as the spring opens I can go to the mill again," said Hugh, after a little pause. Fleda looked at him sorrowfully, and shook her head as she withdrew her eyes.

"I wish father would give up the farm," Hugh went on under his breath. "I cannot bear to live upon uncle Orrin so."

Fleda's answer was to clasp her hands. Her only words were "Don't say anything to aunt Lucy."

"It is of no use to say anything to anybody," said Hugh. "But it weighs me to the ground, Fleda!"

"If uncle Rolf doesn't come home by spring—I hope, I hope he will!—but if he does not, I will take desperate measures. I will try farming myself, Hugh. I will get Earl Douglass or somebody else to play second fiddle, but I will have but one head on the farm, and I will try what mine is worth."

"You could not do it, Fleda."

"One can do anything! with a strong enough motive."

"I'm afraid you'd soon be tired, Fleda."

"Not if I succeeded, not so tired as I am now."

"Poor Fleda! I dare say you are tired!"

"It wasn't *that* I meant," said Fleda, slightly drawing her breath; "I meant this feeling of everything going wrong, and uncle Orrin, and all."

"But you *are* weary," said Hugh affectionately. "I see it in your face."

"Not so much body as mind, after all. Don't tell aunt Lucy I have said all this," she exclaimed after a moment, rousing herself. "I don't always feel so—only once in a while I get such a fit. And now I have just troubled you by speaking of it!"

"You don't trouble anyone in that way very often, dear Fleda," said Hugh, kissing her.

"I ought not at all, you have enough else to think of, but it is a kind of relief sometimes. I like to do these things in general, only now and then I get tired, as I was just now, I suppose, and then one sees everything through a different medium."

"I am afraid it would tire you more to have the charge of Earl Douglass and the farm upon your mind, and mother could be no help to you, nor I, if I am at the mill."

"But there's Seth Plumfield. Oh, I've thought of it all. You don't know what I am up to, Mr. Rossitur. You shall see how I will manage—unless uncle Rolf comes home, in which case I will very gladly forego all my honours and responsibilities together."

"I hope he will come!" said Hugh.

But this hope was to be disappointed. Mr. Rossitur wrote again about the first of March, saying that he hoped to make something of his lands in Michigan, and that he had the prospect of being engaged in some land agencies which would make it worth his while to spend the summer there. He bade his wife let anybody take the farm that could manage it and would pay; and to remit to Dr. Gregory whatever she should receive and could spare. He hoped to do something where he was.

It was just then the beginning of the sugar season; and Mrs. Douglass having renewed and urged Earl's offer of help, Fleda sent Philetus down to ask him to come the next day with his team. Seth Plumfield's, which had drawn the wood in the winter, was now busy in his own sugar business. On Earl Douglass's ground there happened to be no maple trees. His lands were of moderate extent and almost entirely cultivated as a sheep farm; and Mr. Douglass himself, though in very comfortable circumstances, was in the habit of assisting, on advantageous terms, all the farmers in the neighbourhood.

Philetus came back again in a remarkably short time; and announced that he had met Dr. Quackenboss on the way, who had offered to come with *his* team for the desired service.

"Then you have not been to Mr. Douglass's?"

"I have not," said Philetus; "I thought likely you wouldn't calculate to want him teu."

"How came the doctor to know what you were going for?"

"I told him."

"But how came you to tell him?"

"Wall, I guess he had a mind to know," said Philetus, "so I didn't keep it no closer than I had ten."

"Well," said Fleda, biting her lips, "you will have to go down to Mr. Douglass's, nevertheless, Philetus, and tell him the doctor is coming to-morrow, but I should be very much obliged to him if he will be here next day. Will you?"

"Yes, marm."

"Now, dear Hugh, will you make me those little spouts for the trees! of some dry wood—you can get plenty out here. You want to split them up with a hollow chisel, about a quarter of an inch thick, and a little more than half an inch broad. Have you got a hollow chisel?"

"No, but I can get one up the hill. Why must it be hollow?"

"To make little spouts, you know, for the sap to run in. And then, my dear Hugh, they must be sharpened at one end so as to fit where the chisel goes in; I am afraid I have given you a day's work of it. How sorry I am you must go to-morrow to the mill! and yet I am glad too."

"Why need you go round yourself with these people?" said Hugh. "I don't see the sense of it."

"They don't know where the trees are," said Fleda.

"I am sure I do not. Do you?"

"Perfectly well. And besides," said Fleda laughing. "I should have great doubts of the discreetness of Philetus's auger if it were left to his simple direction. I have no notion the trees would yield their sap as kindly to him as to me. But I didn't bargain for Dr. Quackenboss."

Dr. Quackenboss arrived punctually the next morning with his oxen and sled; and by the time it was loaded with the sap-troughs, Fleda in her black cloak, yarn shawl, and grey little hood, came out of the house to the wood-yard. Earl Douglass was there too, not with his team, but merely to see how matters stood and give advice.

"Good-day, Mr. Douglass!" said the doctor. "You see, I'm so fortunate as to have got the start of you."

"Very good," said Earl contentedly, "you may have it; the start's one thing and the pull's another. I'm willin'

anybody should have the start, but it takes a pull to know whether a man's got stuff in him or no."

"What do you mean?" said the doctor.

"I don't mean nothin' at all. You make a start to-day, and I'll come ahint and take the pull to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

He that has light within his own clear breast,
May sit i' the centre and enjoy bright day.—*Milton.*

THE farming plan succeeded beyond Fleda's hopes; thanks not more to her wisdom than to the nice tact with which the wisdom was brought into play. The one was eked out with Seth Plumfield's; the other was all her own. Seth was indefatigably kind and faithful. After his own day's work was done he used to walk down to see Fleda, go with her often to view the particular field or work just then in question, and give her the best counsel dictated by great sagacity and great experience. It was given, too, with equal frankness and intelligence, so that Fleda knew the steps she took, and could maintain them against the prejudice or the ignorance of her subordinates. There was hope of making a good payment to Dr. Gregory in the course of a few months.

As the spring came forward Fleda took care that her garden should,—both gardens indeed. There she and Philetus had the game in their own hands, and beautifully it was managed. Hugh had full occupation at the mill. Many a dollar this summer was earned by the loads of fine fruit and vegetables which Philetus carried to Montepoole; and accident opened a new source of revenue. When the courtyard was in the full blaze of its beauty, one day an admiring passer-by modestly inquired if a few of those exquisite flowers might be had for money. They were given him most cheerfully that time;

but the demand returned, accompanied by the offer, and Fleda obliged herself not to decline it. A trial it was to cut her roses and jessamines for anything but her own or her friends' pleasure, but according to custom she bore it without hesitation. The place became a sort of resort for all the flower-lovers who happened to be staying at the Pool; and rose-leaves were changed into silver pennies as fast as in a fairy-tale.

The gardening frock and gloves were exchanged for those of ordinary wear, and Fleda set off slowly to go up to the saw-mill.

She stopped a moment when she came upon the bridge, to look off to the right where the waters of the little run came hurrying along through a narrow wooded chasm in the hill, murmuring to her of the time when a little child's feet had paused there and a child's heart danced to its music. The freshness of its song was unchanged, the glad rush of its waters was as joyous as ever, but the spirits were quieted that used to answer it with sweeter freshness and lighter joyousness. Its faint echo of the old-time laugh was blended now in Fleda's ear with a gentle wail for the rushing days and swifter fleeing delights of human life; gentle, faint, but clear, she could hear it very well. Taking up her walk again with a step yet slower and a brow yet more quiet, she went on till she came in sight of the little mill; and presently above the noise of the brook could hear the saw going. To her childish ears what a signal of pleasure that had always been; and now—she sighed, and stopping at a little distance looked for Hugh. He was there; she saw him in a moment going forward to stop the machinery, the piece of timber in hand having walked its utmost length up to the saw; when she saw him throwing aside the new-cut board, and adjusting what was left till it was ready for another march up to headquarters. When it stopped the second time Fleda went forward. Hugh must have been busy in his own thoughts, for he did not see her until he had again adjusted the log, and set the noisy works in motion. She stood still. Several huge timbers lay close by, ready for the saw; and on one of them where he had been sitting Fleda saw his Bible lying open. As her eyes went from it to him it struck her heart with a pang that he looked tired and that there was something of delicacy, even of fragility, in the air of face and figure both.

He came to meet her and welcomed her with a smile that, coming upon this feeling, set Fleda's heart a quivering. She

could not at the moment speak; her eye glanced at his open book.

"Yes, it rests me," he said, answering her.

"Rests you, dear Hugh!"

He smiled again. "Here is somebody else that wants resting, I am afraid," said he, placing her gently on the log; and before she had found anything to say he went off again to his machinery. Fleda sat looking at him and trying to clear her bosom of its thick breathing.

"What has brought you up here through the hot sun?" said he, coming back after he had stopped the saw, and sitting down beside her.

Fleda's lip moved nervously and her eye shunned meeting his. Softly pushing back the wet hair from his temples, she said—

"I had one of my fits of doing nothing at home—I didn't feel very bright and thought perhaps you didn't, so on the principle that two negatives make an affirmative——"

"I feel bright," said Hugh gently.

Fleda's eye came down to his, which was steady and clear as the reflection of the sky in Deepwater lake, and then hers fell lower.

"Why don't you, dear Fleda?"

"I believe I am a little tired," Fleda said, trying, but in vain, to command herself and look up, "and there are states of body when anything almost is enough to depress one——"

"And what depresses you now?" said he, very steadily and quietly.

"Oh, I was feeling a little down about things in general," said Fleda, in a choked voice, trying to throw off her load with a long breath; "it's because I am tired, I suppose——"

"I felt so too a little while ago," said Hugh. "But I have concluded to give all that up, Fleda."

Fleda looked at him. Her eyes were swimming full, but his were clear and gentle as ever, only glistening a little in sympathy with hers.

"I thought all was going wrong with us," he went on. "But I found it was only I that was wrong; and since that I have been quite happy, Fleda."

Fleda could not speak to him; his words made her pain worse.

"I told you this rested me," said he, reaching across her for his book; "and now I am never weary long. Shall I rest you with it? What have you been troubling yourself about to-day?"

She did not answer while he was turning over the leaves, and he then said—" Do you remember this, Fleda ?—' *Truly God is good to Israel, even to them that are of a clean heart.*' "

Fleda squeezed his hand, that was all.

Their meditations were interrupted by the tramp of horses, and a party of riders, male and female, came past them up the hill. Hugh looked on as they went by ; Fleda's head was not raised.

" There are some people enjoying themselves," said Hugh. " After all, dear Fleda, we should be very sorry to change places with those gay riders. I would not for a thousand worlds give my hope and treasure for all other they can possibly have, in possession or prospect."

" No, indeed ! " said Fleda energetically, and trying to rouse herself ; " and besides that, Hugh, we have as it is a great deal more to enjoy than most other people. We are so happy——"

In each other, she was going to say, but the words choked her.

" Those people looked very hard at us, or at one of us," said Hugh. " It must have been you, I think, Fleda."

" They are welcome," said Fleda ; " they couldn't have made much out of the back of my sun-bonnet."

" Well, dear Fleda, I must content myself with little more than looking at you now, for Mr. Winegar is in a hurry for his timber to be sawn, and I must set this noisy concern a-going again."

Fleda sat and watched him, with rising and falling hopes and fears, forcing her lips to a smile when he came near her, and hiding her tears at other times ; till the shadows stretching well to the east of the meridian, admonished her she had been there long enough ; and she left him still going backward and forward tending the saw.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Now, the melancholy god protect thee; and the tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for the mind is very opal!—*Twelfth Night.*

"WELL, what did you come home for?" was Barby's salutation; "here's company been waiting for you till they're tired, and I am sure I be."

"Company?" said Fleda.

"Yes, and it's ungrateful in you to say so," said Barby, "for she's been in a wonderful hurry to see you, or to get somethin' to eat; I don't know which; a little o' both, I hope in charity."

"Why didn't you give her something to eat? Who is it?"

"I don't know who it is! It's one of your highflyers, that's all I can make out. She a'n't a hat a bit better than a man's beaver, one 'ud think she had stole her little brother's for a spree, if the rest of her was like common folks; but she's got a tail to her dress as long as from here to Queechy Run; and she's been tiddling in and out here with it puckered up under her arm sixty times. I guess she belongs to some company of female militie, for the body of it is all thick with braid and buttons. I believe she ha'n't sot still five minutes since she come into the house, till I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels."

"Where is aunt Lucy?"

"She's upstairs."

Fleda went in, round to the west room, and there found herself in the arms of the second Miss Evelyn, who jumped to meet her and half-stifled her with caresses.

"My dear little Fleda! it's so delicious to see you again!" said Miss Evelyn, with another prolonged hug and kiss.

"My dear Constance! I am very glad—But where are the rest?"

"It's unkind of you to ask after anybody but me, when I came here this morning on purpose to talk the whole day to you. Now, dear little Fleda," said Miss Constance, executing an impatient little persuasive caper round her, "won't you go out and order dinner? for I am raging. Your woman did give me something, but I found the want of you had taken away all my appetite; and now the delight of seeing you has

exhausted me, and I feel that nature is sinking. The stimulus of gratified affection is too much for me."

"You absurd child!" said Fleda; "you haven't mended a bit. But I told Barby to put on the tea-kettle, and I will administer a composing draught as soon as it can be got ready; we don't indulge in dinners here in this wilderness. Meanwhile suppose that exhausted nature try the support of this easy chair?"

She put the visitor gently into it, and, seating herself upon the arm, held her hand and looked at her, with a smiling face, and yet with eyes that were almost too gentle in their welcoming.

"My dear little Fleda! you're as lovely as you can be! Are you glad to see me?"

"Very?"

"Fleda, you've grown thin! What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing, with that particular purpose."

"I don't care; you've done something. You have been insanely imagining that it is necessary for you to be in three or four places at the same time, and in the distracted effort after ubiquity you are in imminent danger of being nowhere—there's nothing left of you!"

"I don't wonder you were overcome at the sight of me," said Fleda.

"But you are looking charmingly, for all that," Constance went on; "so charmingly that I feel a morbid sensation creeping all over me while I sit regarding you. Really, when you come to us next winter, if you persist in being,—by way of showing your superiority to ordinary human nature,—a rose without a thorn, the rest of the flowers may all shut up at once. And the rose reddens in my very face, to spite me."

"Is 'ordinary human nature' typified by a thorn? You give it rather a poor character."

"I never heard of a Thorn that didn't bear an excellent character," said Constance gravely.

"Hush!" said Fleda, laughing; "I don't want to hear about Mr. Thorn. Tell me of somebody else."

"I haven't said a word about Mr. Thorn," said Constance ecstatically, "but since you ask about him I will tell you. He has not acted like himself since you disappeared from our horizon—that is, he has ceased to be at all pointed in his attentions to me; his conversation has lost all the acute-

ness for which I remember you admired it; he has walked Broadway in a moody state of mind all winter, and grown as dull as is consistent with the essential sharpness of his nature. I ought to except our last interview, though, for his entreaties to mamma that she would bring you home with her were piercing."

Fleda was unable in spite of herself to keep from laughing, but entreated that Constance would tell her of somebody else.

"My respected parents are at Montepoole, with all their offspring, that is, Florence and Edith; I am at present anxiously enquired after, being nobody knows where, and to be fetched by mamma this evening. Wasn't I good, little Fleda, to run away from Mr. Carleton to come and spend a whole day in social converse with you?"

"Carleton?" said Fleda.

"Yes—O, you don't know who *he* is! He's a new attraction—there's been nothing like him this great while, and all New York is topsy-turvy about him; the mothers are dying with anxiety and the daughters with admiration; and it's too delightful to see the cool superiority with which he takes it all; like a new star that all the people are pointing their telescopes at, as Thorn said spitefully the other day. Oh, he has turned *my* head! I have looked till I cannot look at anything else. I can just manage to see a rose, but my dazzled powers of vision are equal to nothing more."

"My dear Constance!"

"It's perfectly true! Why, as soon as we knew he was coming to Montepoole I wouldn't let mamma rest till we all made a rush after him; and when we got here first and I was afraid he wasn't coming, nothing can express the state of my feelings! But he appeared the next morning, and then I was quite happy," said Constance, rising and falling in her chair on what must have been ecstatic springs, for wire ones it had none.

"Constance!" said Fleda, with a miserable attempt at rebuke, "how can you talk so!"

"And so we were all riding round here this morning, and I had the self-denial to stop to see you and leave Florence and the Marlboroughs to monopolize him all the way home. You ought to love me for ever for it. My dear Fleda," said Constance, clasping her hands and elevating her eyes in mock ecstasy, "if you had ever seen Mr. Carleton!"

"I daresay I have seen somebody as good," said Fleda quietly.

"My dear Fleda" said Constance, a little scornfully this

time, " you haven't the least idea what you are talking about ! I tell you he is an Englishman—he's of one of the best families in England—not such as you ever see here but once in an age ; he's rich enough to count Mr. Thorn over I don't know how many times."

" I don't like anybody the better for being an Englishman," said Fleda ; " and it must be a small man whose purse will hold his measure."

Constance made an impatient gesture.

" But I tell you it isn't ! We knew him when we were abroad, and we know what he is, and we know his mother very well. When we were in England we were a week with them down at their beautiful place in ——shire, the loveliest time ! You see, she was over here with Mr. Carleton once before, a good while ago ; and mamma and papa were polite to them, and so they showed us a great deal of attention when we were in England. We had the loveliest time down there you could possibly conceive."

" How long have you been here ? "

" Oh, a day or two—and it has poured with rain every single day since we came, till this one ; and just think ! " said Constance, with a ludicrously scared face, " I must make haste and be back again. You see, I came away on principle, that I may strike with the effect of novelty when I appear again ; but if I stay *too* long, you know, there is a point——"

" On the principle of the ice-boats," said Fleda, " that back a little to give a better blow to the ice, where they find it tough ? "

" Tough ! " said Constance.

" Does Florence like this paragon of yours as well as you do?"

" I don't know—she don't talk so much about him, but that proves nothing ; she's too happy *to* talk to him. I expect our family concord will be shattered by and by ! " said Constance, shaking her head.

" You seem to take the prospect philosophically," said Fleda, looking amused. " How long are you going to stay at the Pool ? "

Constance gave an expressive shrug, intimating that the deciding of that question did not rest with her.

" That is to say, you are here to watch the transit of this star over the meridian of Queechy ? "

" Of Queechy ! of Montepoole."

" Very well—of Montepoole. I don't wonder that nature is exhausted. I will go and see after this refection."

The prettiest little meal in the world was presently set forth for the two.

The lady was apparently hungry, for there was a minute of silence while the refection began, and then Constance exclaimed, perhaps with a sudden appreciation of the delicious bread and butter and cream and strawberries, "What a lovely old room this is! and what lovely times you have here, don't you, Fleda?"

"Yes—sometimes," Fleda said, with a sigh.

"But I shall tell mamma you are growing thin, and the first minute we get home I shall send for you to come to us. Mrs. Thorn will be amazingly glad to see you."

"Has she got back from Europe?" said Fleda.

"Ages! and she's been entertaining the world as hard as she could ever since. I have no doubt Lewis has confided to the maternal bosom all his distresses; and there never was anything like the rush that I expect will be made to our greenhouse next winter. Oh, Fleda, you should see Mr. Carleton's greenhouses!"

"Should I?" said Fleda.

"Dear me! I hope mamma will come!" said Constance with a comical fidgety shake of herself; "when I think of those greenhouses I lose my self-command. And the park! Fleda, it's the loveliest thing you ever saw in your life; and it's all that delightful man's doing; only he won't have a geometric flower-garden, as I did everything I could think of to persuade him. I pity the woman that will be his wife, she won't have her own way in a single thing; but then he will fascinate her into thinking that his way is the best, so it will do just as well, I suppose. Do you know, I can't conceive what he has come over here for? He has been here before, you know, and he don't seem to me to know exactly what he means to do; at least, I can't find out, and I have tried."

"How long has he been here?"

"Oh, a month or two—since the beginning of April, I believe. He came over with some friends of his—a Sir George Egerton, and his family; he is going to Canada, to be established in some post there, I forget what; and they are spending part of the summer here before they fix themselves at the North. It is easy to see what *they* are here for, they are strangers and amusing themselves; but Mr. Carleton is at home, and *not* amusing himself, at least he don't seem to be. He goes about with the Egertons, but that is just for his friendship for them; and he puzzles me. He don't know

whether he is going to Niagara—he has been once already—and 'perhaps' he may go to Canada, and 'possibly' he will make a journey to the West, and I can't find out that he wants anything in particular."

"Perhaps he don't mean that you shall," said Fleda.

"Perhaps he don't; but you see that aggravates my state of mind to a distressing degree. And then I'm afraid he will go somewhere where I can't keep watch of him!"

Fleda could not help laughing.

"Perhaps he was tired of home and came for mere weariness."

"Weariness! it's my opinion he has no idea that there is such a word in the language. Why, at Carleton it seems to me he was half the time on horseback, flying about from one end of the country to the other; and when he is in the house he is always at work at something; it's a piece of condescension to get him to attend to you at all; only when he does, my dear Fleda, he is so enchanting that you live in a state of delight till next time. And yet I never could get him to pay me a compliment to this minute. I tried two or three times, and he rewarded me with some very rude speeches."

"Rude!" said Fleda.

"Yes—that is, they were the most graceful and fascinating things possible, but they would have been rudeness in anybody else. Where *is* mamma!" said Constance, with another comic counterfeit of distress. "My dear Fleda, it's the most captivating thing to breakfast at Carleton!"

"I have no idea the bread and butter is sweeter there than in some other parts of the world," said Fleda.

"I don't know about the bread and butter," said Constance, "but those exquisite little sugar-dishes! My dear Fleda, every one has his own sugar dish and cream ewer—the loveliest little things!——"

"I have heard of such things before," said Fleda.

"I don't care about the bread and butter," said Constance; "eating is immaterial, with those perfect little things right opposite to me. They weren't like any you ever saw, Fleda; the sugar-bowl was just a little plain oval box, with the lid on a hinge, and not a bit of chasing, only the arms on the cover; like nothing I ever saw but an old-fashioned silver tea-caddy; and the cream-jug a little straight up and down thing to match. Mamma said they were clumsy, but they bewitched me!"

"I think everything bewitched you," said Fleda, smiling. "Can't your head stand a sugar-dish and milk-cup?"

"My dear Fleda, I never had your superiority to the ordinary weakness of human nature, I can stand *one* sugar-bowl, but I confess myself overcome by a dozen. How we have all wanted to see you, Fleda! and papa, you have captivated papa; and he says——"

"Never mind, don't tell me what he says," said Fleda.

"There, that's your modesty, that everybody raves about—I wish I could catch it."

And so the conversation went on, till Mrs. Evelyn and her other daughters made their appearance.

Then Barby said she thought they'd have talked the house down; and she expected there'd be nothing left of Fleda after all the kissing she got. But it was not too much for Fleda's pleasure. Mrs. Evelyn was so tenderly kind, and Miss Evelyn as caressing as her sister had been, and Edith, who was but a child, so joyously delighted, that Fleda's eyes were swimming in happiness as she looked from one to the other, and she could hardly answer kisses and questions fast enough.

"Them is good-looking enough girls," said Barby, as Fleda came back to the house after seeing them to their carriage, "if they knowed how to dress themselves. I never see this fly-away one 'afore—I knowed the old one as soon as I clapped my eyes onto her. Be they stopping at the Pool again?"

"Yes."

"Well, when are you going up there to see 'em?"

"I don't know," said Fleda quietly. And then sighing as the thought of her aunt came into her head, she went off to find her and bring her down.

CHAPTER XXX.

Ant. He misses not much.
Seb. No; he doth but mistake the truth totally.—*Tempest.*

It was the very next morning that several ladies and gentlemen were gathered on the piazza of the hotel at Montepoole, to brace minds or appetites with the sweet mountain air while waiting for breakfast. As they stood there a young countryman came by bearing on his hip a large basket of fruit and vegetables.

"Oh, look at those lovely strawberries!" exclaimed Constance Evelyn, running down the steps. "Stop, if you please—where are you going with these?"

"Marm!" responded the somewhat startled carrier.

"Whose are they? Are they for sale?"

"Well, 'twon't deu no harm, as I know," said the young man, making a virtue of necessity, for the fingers of Constance were already hovering over the dainty little leaf-strewn baskets and her eyes complacently searching for the most promising; "I ha'n't got nothin' to deu with 'em."

"Constance!" said Mrs. Evelyn from the piazza, "don't take that! I dare say they are for Mr. Sweet."

"Well, mamma!" said Constance, with great equanimity, "Mr. Sweet gets them for me, and I only save him the trouble of spoiling them. My taste leads me to prefer the simplicity of primitive arrangements this morning."

"Young man!" called out the landlady's reproving voice, "won't you never recollect to bring that basket round the back way?"

"'Tain't no handier than this way," said Philetus, with so much belligerent demonstration that the landlady thought best in presence of her guests to give over the question.

"Where do they come from? Are they fresh picked?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Just afore I started."

"Started from where?"

"From Mr. Rossitur's, down to Queechy."

"Mr. Rossitur's!" said Mrs. Evelyn; "does he send them here?"

"He does not," said Philetus; "he doesn't keep to hum for a long spell."

"Who does send them then?" said Constance.

"Who doos? It's Miss Fliddy Ringgan."

"Mamma!" exclaimed Constance, looking up.

"What does she have to do with it?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"There don't nobody else have nothin' to deu with it—I guess she's pretty much the hull," said her coadjutor. "Her and me was picking 'em afore sunrise."

"But where is Mr. Hugh?"

"He's to hum."

"But has he nothing to do with all this? Does he leave it all to his cousin?"

"He's to the mill."

"And Miss Ringgan manages farm and garden and all?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"She doos," said Philetus.

And receiving a gratuity which he accepted without demonstration of any kind whatever, the basket-bearer at length released moved off.

"Poor Fleda!" said Miss Evelyn, as he disappeared with his load.

"She's a very clever girl," said Mrs Evelyn, dismissing the subject.

"She's too lovely for anything!" said Constance. "Mr. Carleton, if you will just imagine we are in China, and introduce a pair of familiar chopsticks into this basket, I shall be repaid for the loss of a strawberry by the expression of ecstasy which will immediately spread itself over your features. I intend to patronise the natural mode of eating in future. I find the ends of my fingers decidedly odoriferous."

He smiled a little as he complied with the young lady's invitation, but the expression of ecstasy did not come.

"Are Mr. Rossitur's circumstances so much reduced?" he said, drawing nearer to Mrs. Evelyn.

"Do you know them?" exclaimed both the daughters at once.

"I knew Mrs. Rossitur very well some years ago, when she was in Paris."

"They are all broken to pieces," said Mrs. Evelyn, as Mr. Carleton's eye went back to her for his answer. "Mr. Rossitur failed, and lost everything—bankrupt—a year or two after they came home."

"And what has he been doing since?"

"I don't know!—trying to farm it here; but I am afraid he has not succeeded well—I am afraid not. They don't look

like it. Mrs. Rossitur will not see anybody, and I don't believe they have done any more than struggle for a living since they came here."

"Where is Mr. Rossitur now?"

"He is at the West somewhere. Fleda tells me he is engaged in some agencies there; but I doubt," said Mrs. Evelyn, shaking her head compassionately, "there is more in the name of it than anything else. He has gone down-hill sadly since his misfortunes. I am very sorry for them."

"And his niece takes care of his farm in the meantime?"

"Do you know her?" asked both the Miss Evelyns again.

"I can hardly say that," he replied. "I had such a pleasure formerly. Do I understand that *she* is the person to fill Mr. Rossitur's place when he is away?"

"So she says."

"And so she acts," said Constance.

"And this has been her life ever since Mr. Rossitur lost his property!"

"Entirely—sacrificed!" said Mrs. Evelyn, with a compassionately resigned air; "education, advantages, and everything given up, and set down here where she has seen nobody from year's end to year's end but the country people round about—very good people, but not the kind of people she ought to have been brought up among."

"Oh, mamma!" said the eldest Miss Evelyn, in a deprecatory tone, "you shouldn't talk so; it isn't right. I am sure she is very nice—nicer now than anybody else I know; and clever too."

"Nice!" said Edith; "I wish *I* had such a sister!"

"She is a good girl—a very good girl," said Mrs. Evelyn, in a tone which would have deterred any one from wishing to make her acquaintance.

"And happy, mamma. Fleda don't look miserable; she seems perfectly happy and contented."

"Yes," said Mrs. Evelyn, "she has got accustomed to this state of things—it's her life. She is a very good girl, but she might have been made something much better than a farmer's wife."

"You may set your mind at rest on that subject, mamma," said Constance, still using her chop-sticks with great complacency; "it's my opinion that the farmer is not in existence who is blessed with such a conjugal futurity. I think Fleda's strong pastoral tastes are likely to develope themselves in a new direction."

Mrs. Evelyn looked with a partial smile at the pretty features which the business of eating the strawberries displayed in sundry novel and picturesque points of view; and asked what she meant?

"I don't know," said Constance, intent upon her basket; "I feel a friend's distress for Mr. Thorn. It's all your doing, mamma; you won't be able to look him in the face when we have Fleda next fall—I am sure I shall not want to look at his! He'll be too savage for anything."

"Mr. Thorn!" said Mr. Carleton.

"Yes," said Mrs. Evelyn in an indulgent tone. "He was very attentive to her last winter when she was with us, but she went away before anything was decided. I don't think he has forgotten her."

"I shouldn't think anybody could forget her," said Edith.

"I am confident he would be here at this moment," said Constance, "if he wasn't in London."

"But what is 'all mamma's doing,' Constance?" inquired her sister.

"The destruction of the peace of the whole family of Thorns. I shouldn't sleep sound in my bed, if I were she, with such a reflection. I look forward to heart-rending scenes, with a very disturbed state of mind."

"But what have I done, my child?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Didn't you introduce your favourite Mr. Olmney to Miss Ringgan last summer? I don't know! her native delicacy shrunk from making any disclosures, and of course the tongue of friendship is silent; but I introduced his name in my usual happy manner, and I found that Miss Ringgan's cheeks were by no means indifferent to it. I didn't dare go any further."

"I am very glad of it! I hope it is so!" said Mrs. Evelyn energetically. "It would be a most excellent match. He is a charming young man and would make her very happy."

"You are exciting gloomy feelings in Mr. Carleton's mind, mamma, by your felicitous suggestions. Mr. Carleton—did your ears receive a faint announcement of ham and eggs which went quite through and through mine just now?"

He bowed and handed the young lady in; but Constance declared that though he sat beside her and took care of her at breakfast, he had on one of his intangible fits which drove her to the last extreme of impatience and captivation.

The sun was not much more than two hours high the next morning when a rider was slowly approaching Mr. Rossitur's house from the bridge, walking his horse like a man who wished

to look well at all he was passing. He paused behind a clump of locusts and rose-acacias in the corner of the courtyard as a figure, bonneted and gloved, came out of the house and began to be busy among the rose-bushes. Another figure presently appeared at the hall-door and called out—

"Fleda!"

"Well, Barby?"

This second voice was hardly raised, but it came from so much nearer that the words could be distinctly heard.

"Mr. Skillcorn wants to know if you're going to fix the flowers for him to carry?"

"They're not ready, and it won't do for him to wait; Mr. Sweet must send for them if he wants them. Philetus must make haste back, for you know Mr. Douglass wants him to help in the barn meadow. Lucas won't be here, and now the weather is so fine I want to make haste with the hay."

"Well, will you have the samp for breakfast?"

"No, we'll keep that for dinner. I'll come in and poach some eggs, Barby, if you'll make me some thin pieces of toast, and call me when it's time. Thin, Barby."

The gentleman turned his horse and galloped back to Montepoole.

Some disappointment was created among a portion of Mr. Sweet's guests that afternoon by the intelligence that Mr. Carleton purposed setting off the next morning to join his English friends at Saratoga on their way to the Falls and Canada. Which purpose was duly carried into effect.

CHAPTER XXXI.

With your leave, sir, an' there were no more men living upon the face of the earth, I should not fancy him, by St. George.—*Every Man out of his Humour.*

OCTOBER had come; and a fair season and a fine harvest had enabled Fleda to ease her mind by sending a good remittance to Dr. Gregory. The family were still living upon her and Hugh's energies. Mr. Rossitur talked of coming home, that was all.

It sometimes happened that a pause in the urgency of business permitted Hugh to take a day's holiday. One of these falling soon after the frosts had opened the burrs of the chestnut trees and the shells of the hickories, Fleda seized upon it for a nutting frolic. They took Philetus and went up to the fine group of trees on the mountain, the most difficult to reach and the best worth reaching of all their nut wood. The sport was very fine; and after spoiling the trees Philetus was left to "shuck" and bring home a load of the fruit; while Fleda and Hugh took their way slowly down the mountain. She stopped him, as usual, on the old look-out place.

"How long it seems," she said, "how very long, since I was here with Mr. Carleton; just nine years ago. How changed everything is! I was a little child then. It seems such an age ago!"

"It is very odd he didn't come to see us," said Hugh.

"He did; don't you know? The very next day after we heard he was here, when most unluckily I was up at aunt Miriam's."

"I should think he might have come again, considering what friends you used to be."

"I daresay he would if he had not left Montepoole so soon. But, dear Hugh! I was a mere child—how could he remember me much?"

"You remember him," said Hugh.

"Ah, but I have good reason. Besides, I never forget anything. I would have given a great deal to see him, if I had it."

"I wish the Evelyns had stayed longer," said Hugh. "I think you have wanted something to brighten you up. They did you a great deal of good last year."

"I don't know that I should want to go again," said Fleda.

"They don't raise my spirits, Hugh. I am amused sometimes —I can't help that—but such excessive gaiety rather makes me shrink within myself; I am too out of tone with it. I never feel more absolutely quiet than sometimes when I am laughing at Constance Evelyn's mad sallies—and sometimes I cannot laugh at them. I do not know what they must think of me; it is what they can have no means of understanding."

"I wish you didn't understand it either, Fleda."

"But you shouldn't say that. I am happier than they are, now, Hugh, now that you are better, with all their means of happiness. They know nothing of our quiet enjoyments; they must live in a whirl or they would think they are not living at all; and I do not believe that all New York can give them the real pleasure that I have in such a day as this."

And pulling Hugh after her away she went down the rocky path, with a step too light to care for the stones; the little feet capering down the mountain with a disdain of the ground that made Hugh smile to see her; and eyes dancing for company; till they reached the lower woodland.

"A most spirited waltz!" said Hugh.

"And a most slack partner. Why didn't you keep me company?"

"I never was made for waltzing," said Hugh, shaking his head.

"Not to the tune of the North wind? That has done me good, Hugh."

"So I should judge, by your cheeks."

They walked on quietly and soberly to the brow of the table-land, where they parted; Hugh being obliged to go home, and Fleda wishing to pay a visit to her aunt Miriam.

The old lady had been rather ailing, and from one or two expressions she had let fall Fleda could not help thinking that she looked upon her ailments with a much more serious eye than anybody else thought was called for. It did not, however, appear to-day. She was not worse, and Fleda's slight anxious feeling could find nothing to justify it, if it were not the very calm and quietly happy face and manner of the old lady; and that if it had something to alarm, did much more to soothe. Fleda had sat with her a long time, patience and cheerfulness all the while unconsciously growing in her company; when catching up her bonnet with a sudden haste very unlike her usual collectedness of manner, Fleda kissed her aunt and was rushing away.

"But stop! where are you going, Fleda?"

"Home, aunt Miriam—I must—don't keep me!"

But with equal precipitation Fleda had cast her bonnet out of sight behind the table, and at the next moment turned with the utmost possible quietness to shake hands with Mr. Olmney. Aunt Miriam had presence of mind enough to make no remark and receive the young gentleman with her usual dignity and kindness.

He staid some time, but Fleda's hurry seemed to have forsaken her. She had seized upon an interminable long grey stocking her aunt was knitting, and sat in the corner working at it most diligently, without raising her eyes unless spoken to.

"Do you give yourself no rest at home or abroad, Miss Fleda?" said the gentleman.

"Put that stocking down, Fleda," said her aunt; "it is in no hurry."

"I like to do it, aunt Miriam."

But she felt with warming cheeks that she did not like to do it with two people sitting still and looking at her. The gentleman presently rose.

"Don't go till we have had tea, Mr. Olmney," said Mrs. Plumfield.

"Thank you, ma'am, I cannot stay, I believe, unless Miss Fleda will let me take care of her down the hill by and by."

"Thank you, Mr. Olmney," said Fleda, "but I am not going home before night, unless they send for me."

"I am afraid," said he, looking at her, "that the agricultural turn has proved an over-match for your energies."

"The farm don't complain of me, does it?" said Fleda, looking up at him with a comic grave expression of countenance.

"No," said he, laughing—"certainly not; but, if you will forgive me for saying so, I think you complain of it tacitly, and that will raise a good many complaints in other quarters if you do not take care of yourself."

He shook hands and left them; and Mrs. Plumfield sat silently looking at Fleda, who on her part looked at nothing but the grey stocking.

"What is all this, Fleda?"

"What is what, aunt Miriam?" said Fleda, picking up a stitch with desperate diligence.

"Why did you want to run away from Mr. Olmney?"

"I didn't wish to be delayed, I wanted to get home."

"Then why wouldn't you let him go home with you?"

"I liked better to go alone, aunt Miriam."

"Don't you like him, Fleda?"

"Certainly, aunt Miriam, very much."

"I think he likes you, Fleda," said her aunt, smiling.

"I am very sorry for it," said Fleda, with great gravity.

Mrs. Plumfield looked at her for a few minutes in silence, and then said—

"Fleda, love, come over here and sit by me and tell me what you mean, why are you sorry? It has given me a great deal of pleasure to think of it."

But Fleda did not budge from her seat or her stocking, and seemed tongue-tied. Mrs. Plumfield pressed for an answer.

"Because, aunt Miriam," said Fleda, with the prettiest red cheeks in the world but speaking very clearly and steadily, "my liking only goes to a point which I am afraid will not satisfy either him or you."

"But why?—it will go further."

"No, ma'am."

"Why not? why do you say so?"

"Because I must if you ask me!"

"But what could be more excellent and estimable, Fleda? who could be more worth liking? I should have thought he would just please you. He is one of the most lovely young men I have ever seen."

"Dear aunt Miriam," said Fleda, looking up beseechingly, "why should we talk about it?"

"Because I want to understand, Fleda, and to be sure that you understand yourself."

"I do," said Fleda, quietly and with a quivering lip.

"What is there that you dislike about Mr. Olmney?"

"Nothing in the world, aunt Miriam."

"Then what is the reason you cannot like him enough?"

"Because, aunt Miriam," said Fleda, speaking in desperation, "there isn't enough of him. He is *very* good and excellent in every way—nobody feels that more than I do—I don't want to say a word against him, but I do not think he has a very strong mind; and he isn't cultivated enough."

"But you cannot have everything, Fleda."

"No, ma'am, I don't expect it."

"I am afraid you have set up too high a standard for yourself," said Mrs. Plumfield, looking rather troubled.

"I don't think that is possible, aunt Miriam."

"But I am afraid it will prevent you ever liking anybody?"

"It will not prevent my liking the friends I have already—it may prevent my leaving them for somebody else," said Fleda, with a gravity that was touching in its expression.

"But Mr. Olmney is sensible, and well educated."

"Yes, but his tastes are not. He could not at all enter into a great many things that give me the most pleasure. I do not think he quite understands above half of what I say to him."

"Are you sure? I know he admires you, Fleda."

"Ah, but that is only half enough, you see, aunt Miriam, unless I could admire him too."

Mrs. Plumfield looked at her in some difficulty; Mr. Olmney was not the only one, clearly, whose powers of comprehension were not equal to the subject.

"Fleda," said her aunt inquiringly, "is there anybody else that has put Mr. Olmney out of your head?"

"Nobody in the world!" exclaimed Fleda with a frank look and tone of astonishment at the question, and cheeks colouring as promptly. "How could you ask? But he never was in my head, aunt Miriam."

"Mr. Thorn?" said Mrs. Plumfield.

"Mr. Thorn!" said Fleda indignantly. "Don't you know me better than that, aunt Miriam? But you do not know him."

"I believe I know you, dear Fleda, but I heard he had paid you a great deal of attention last year; and you would not have been the first unsuspecting nature that has been mistaken."

Fleda was silent, flushed and disturbed; and Mrs. Plumfield was silent and meditating, when Hugh came in. He came to fetch Fleda home. Dr. Gregory had arrived. In haste again Fleda sought her bonnet, and exchanging a more than usually wistful and affectionate kiss and embrace with her aunt, set off with Hugh down the hill.

Hugh had a great deal to say to her all the way home, of which Fleda's ears alone took the benefit, for her understanding received none of it; and when she at last came into the breakfast-room where the doctor was sitting, the fact of his being there was the only one which had entered her mind.

"Here she is! I declare!" said the doctor, holding her back to look at her after the first greetings had passed. "I'll be hanged if you ain't handsome! Now what's the use of pinking your cheeks any more at that, as if you didn't know it before, eh?"

"I will always do my best to deserve your good opinion, sir," said Fleda, laughing.

"Well, sit down now," said he, shaking his head, "and pour me out a cup of tea, your mother can't make it right."

And sipping his tea, for some time the old doctor sat listening to Mrs. Rossitur and eating bread and butter; saying little, but casting a very frequent glance at the figure opposite him behind the tea-board.

"I am afraid," said he after a while, "that your care for my good opinion won't outlast an occasion. Is *that* the way you look for every day?"

The colour came with the smile; but the old doctor looked at her in a way that made the tears come too. He turned his eyes to Mrs. Rossitur for an explanation.

"She is well," said Mrs. Rossitur fondly, "she has been very well—except her old headaches now and then; I think she has grown rather thin lately."

"Well," said the doctor to Fleda, "prepare yourself, gentle Saxon, to ride home with me the day after to-morrow."

"I don't think that is possible, uncle Orrin," said Fleda gently.

"We'll talk about the possibility afterwards—at present all you have to do is to get ready. If you raise difficulties you will find me a very Hercules to clear them away—I'm substantial enough, I can tell you—so it's just as well to spare yourself and me the trouble."

"There are no difficulties," Mrs. Rossitur and Hugh said both at once.

"I knew there weren't. Put a pair or two of clean stockings in your trunk—that's all you want—Mrs. Pritchard and I will find the rest. There's the people in Fourteenth Street want you for the first of November, and I want you all the time till then, and longer too. Stop—I've got a missive of some sort here for you."

He foisted out of his breast-pocket a little package of notes; one from Mrs. Evelyn and one from Florence, begging Fleda to come to them at the time the doctor had named; the third from Constance—

"My Darling little Fleda,—I am dying to see you—so pack up and come down with Dr. Gregory if the least spark of regard for me is slumbering in your breast—Mamma and Florence are writing to beg you.

"I am in a state of mind that baffles description—Mr. Carleton is going home!

" I have not worn earrings in my ears for a fortnight—my personal appearance is become a matter of indifference to me—any description of mental exertion is excruciating. I sit constantly listening for the ringing of the door-bell, and when it sounds I rush frantically to the head of the staircase and look over to see who it is—the mere sight of pen and ink excites delirious ideas—judge what I suffer in writing to you.

" To make the matter worse (if it could be) I have been informed privately that he is going home to crown at the altar of Hymen an old attachment to one of the loveliest of all England's daughters. Conceive the complication of my feelings!

" Nothing is left me but the resources of friendship, so come, darling Fleda, before a barrier of ice interposes itself between my chilled heart and your sympathy.

" Mr. Thorn's state would move my pity if I were capable of being moved by anything—by this you will comprehend he is returned. He has been informed by somebody that there is a wolf in sheep's clothing prowling about Queechy, and his head is filled with the idea that you have fallen a victim, of which in my calmer moments I have in vain endeavoured to dispossess him. Every morning we are awakened up at an unseasonable hour by a furious ringing at the door-bell—Joe Manton pulls off his nightcap and slowly descending the stairs opens the door and finds Mr. Thorn, who enquires distractedly whether Miss Ringgan has arrived; and being answered in the negative gloomily walks off towards the East river. The state of anxiety in which his mother is thereby kept is rapidly depriving her of all her flesh; but we have directed Joe lately to reply, ' No, sir, but she is expected '—upon which Mr. Thorn regularly smiles faintly and rewards the ' fowling piece ' with a quarter dollar——

" So make haste, dear Fleda, or I shall feel that we are acting the part of innocent swindlers. C. E."

There was but one voice at home on the point whether Fleda should go. So she went.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Host. Now my young guest! methinks your'e allychory; I pray you why is it?
Jul. Marry, mine host, because I cannot be merry.
—*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

SOME nights after their arrival the doctor and Fleda were seated at tea in the little snug old-fashioned back parlour, where the doctor's nicest of housekeepers, Mrs. Pritchard, had made it ready for them.

"When are you going to Mrs. Evelyn?" he said.

"They say next week, sir."

"I shall be glad of it!" said the doctor.

"Glad of it?" said Fleda, smiling. "Do you want to get rid of me, uncle Orrin?"

"Yes!" said he. "This isn't the right place for you. You are too much alone."

"No, indeed, sir. I have been reading voraciously and enjoying myself as much as possible. I would quite as lieve be here as there, putting you out of the question."

"What do you suppose you have come to New York for?" said he.

"To see you, sir, in the first place, and the Evelyns in the second."

"And who in the third?"

"I am afraid the third place is vacant," said Fleda, smiling.

"You are, eh? Well—I don't know—but I know that I have been enquired of by two several and distinct people as to your coming. Ah, you needn't open your bright eyes at me, because I shall not tell you. Only let me ask,—you have no notion of fencing off my Queechy rose with a hedge of black-thorn, or anything of that kind, have you?"

"I have no notion of any fences at all, except invisible ones, sir," said Fleda, laughing and colouring very prettily.

"Well, those are not American fences," said the doctor, "so I suppose I am safe enough. Whom did I see you out riding with yesterday?"

"I was with Mrs. Evelyn," said Fleda. "I didn't want to go, but I couldn't very well help myself."

"Mrs. Evelyn! Mrs. Evelyn wasn't driving, was she?"

"No, sir; Mr. Thorn was driving."

"I thought so. Have you seen your old friend Mr. Carleton yet?"

"Do you know him, uncle Orrin?"

"Why shouldn't I? Have you seen him?"

"But how did you know that he was an old friend of mine?"

"Question?" said the doctor. "Hum—well, I won't tell you—so there's the answer. Now will you answer me?"

"I have not seen him, sir."

"Haven't met him in all the times you have been to Mrs. Evelyn's?"

"No, sir. I have been there but once in the evening, uncle Orrin. He is just about sailing for England."

"Well, you're going there to-night, aren't you? Run and bundle yourself up and I'll take you there before I begin my work."

There was a small party that evening at Mrs. Evelyn's. Fleda was very early. She ran up to the first floor,—rooms lighted and open, but nobody there.

"Fleda Ringgan," called out the voice of Constance from over the stairs—"is that you?"

"Yes," said Fleda.

"Well, just wait till I come down to you. My darling little Fleda, it's delicious of you to come so early. Now just tell me, —am I captivating?"

"Well,—I retain self-possession," said Fleda. "I cannot tell about the strength of head of other people."

"You wretched little creature! Fleda, don't you admire my hair? It's new style, my dear, just come out; the Delancys brought it out with them—Eloise Delancy taught it us—isn't it graceful? Nobody in New York has it yet, except the Delancys and we."

"How do you know but they have taught somebody else?" said Fleda.

"I won't talk to you! Don't you like it?"

"I am not sure that I do not like you in your ordinary way better."

And with her head first on one side and then on the other, Constance stood before the glass looking at herself and Fleda by turns with such a comic expression of mock doubt and anxiety that no gravity but her own could stand it.

"She is a silly girl, Fleda, isn't she?" said Mrs. Evelyn, coming up behind them.

"Mamma! am I captivating?" cried Constance, wheeling round.

The mother's smile said, "Very!"

"Fleda is wishing she were out of the sphere of my influence, mamma. Wasn't Mr. Olmney afraid of my corrupting you?" she said, with a sudden pull-up in front of Fleda. "My blessed stars! there's somebody's voice I know."

With the entrance of company came Constance's return from extravaganzas to a sufficiently graceful everyday manner, only enough touched with high spirits and lawlessness to free it from the charge of commonplace. But the contrast of these high spirits with her own rather made Fleda's mood more quiet, and it needed no quieting. Of the sundry people that she knew among those presently assembled there were none that she wanted to talk to; the rooms were hot and she felt nervous and fluttered, partly from encounters already sustained and partly from a little anxious expecting of Mr. Carleton's appearance. The Evelyns had not said he was to be there, but she had rather gathered it; and the remembrance of old times was strong enough to make her very earnestly wish to see him and dread to be disappointed. She swung clear of Mrs. Thorn, with some difficulty, and ensconced herself under the shadow of a large cabinet, between that and a young lady who was very good society, for she wanted no help in carrying on the business of it. All Fleda had to do was to sit still and listen, or not listen, which she generally preferred.

"My dear Fleda! what are you back here for?" said Florence, coming up to her.

"I was glad to be at a safe distance from the fire."

"Take a screen."

The seat beside her was vacated, and Fleda sprang up and took a place in the far corner of the room by Mrs. Thorn, who, very much gratified at Fleda's choice of a seat, talked to her with a benignity which Fleda could not help answering with grateful pleasure.

"Little Queechy, what has driven you into the corner?" said Constance, pausing a moment before her.

"It must have been a retiring spirit," said Fleda.

"Mrs. Thorn, isn't she lovely?"

Mrs. Thorn's smile at Fleda might almost have been called that, it was so full of benevolent pleasure. But she spoiled it by her answer.

"I don't believe I am the first one to find it out."

"But what are you looking so sober for?" Constance went on, taking Fleda's screen from her hand and fanning her diligently with it. "You don't talk! The gravity of Miss

Ringgan's face casts a gloom over the brightness of the evening. I couldn't conceive what made me feel chilly in the other room, till I looked about and found that the shade came from this corner; and Mrs. Thorn's teeth I saw were chattering."

"Constance!" said Fleda, laughing and vexed, and making the reproof more strongly with her eyes, "how can you talk so!"

"Mrs. Thorn, isn't it true?"

Mrs. Thorn's look at Fleda was the essence of good humour.

"Will you let Lewis come and take you a good long ride to-morrow?"

"No, Mrs. Thorn, I believe not; I intend to stay perseveringly at home to-morrow, and see if it is possible to be quiet a day in New York."

"But you will go with me to the concert to-morrow night, both of you, and hear Truffi?—come to my house, and take tea and go from there; will you, Constance?"

"My dear Mrs. Thorn!" said Constance, "I shall be in ecstasies, and Miss Ringgan was privately imploring me last night to find some way of getting her to it. We regard such material pleasures as tea and muffins with great indifference, but when you look up after swallowing your last cup you will see Miss Ringgan and Miss Evelyn, cloaked and hooded, anxiously awaiting your next movement. My dear Fleda, there is a ring!"

And giving her the benefit of a most comic and expressive arching of her eyebrows, Constance flung back the screen into Fleda's lap and skimmed away.

Fleda was too vexed for a few minutes to understand more of Mrs. Thorn's talk than that she was first enlarging upon the concert, and afterwards detailing to her a long shopping expedition in search of something which had been a morning's annoyance. She almost thought Constance was unkind, because she wanted to go to the concert herself, to lug her in so unceremoniously, and wished herself back in her uncle's snug little quiet parlour,—unless Mr. Carleton would come.

And there he is! said a quick beat of her heart, as his entrance explained Constance's "ring."

Such a rush of association came over Fleda that she was in imminent danger of losing Mrs. Thorn altogether.

"Just the same! he has not altered a jot," she said to herself as he came forward to Mrs. Evelyn; "it is himself!—

his very self ; he doesn't look a day older. I'm very glad !—(Yes, ma'am, it's extremely tiresome—). How exactly as when he left me in Paris, and how much pleasanter than anybody else !—more pleasant than ever, it seems to me, but that is because I have not seen him in so long. I know very little about it, ma'am ; I am not learned in laces—I never bought any—) I wish he would look this way—I wonder if Mrs. Evelyn does not mean to bring him to see me—she must remember. Now there is that curious old smile and looking down ! How much better I know what it means than Mrs. Evelyn does !—(Yes, ma'am, I understand—I mean !—it is very convenient. I never go anywhere else to get anything—at least, I should not if I lived here—). She does not know whom she is talking to. She is going to walk him off into the other room ! How very much more gracefully he does everything than anybody else !—(Yes, ma'am, my face is flushed ; the room is very warm—) "

" But the fire has gone down ; it will be cooler now," said Mrs. Thorn.

Which were the first words that fairly entered Fleda's understanding. She was glad to use the screen to hide her face now, not the fire.

Apparently the gentleman and lady found nothing to detain them in the other room, for after sauntering off to it they sauntered back again and placed themselves to talk just opposite her. Fleda had an additional screen now in the person of a Miss Tomlinson, who had sought her corner and was earnestly talking across her to Mrs. Thorn ; so that she was sure, even if Mr. Carleton's eyes should chance to wander that way, they would see nothing but the unremarkable skirt of her green silk dress, most unlikely to detain them. The trade in nothings going on over the said green silk was very brisk indeed ; but disregarding the buzz of tongues near at hand, Fleda's quick ears were able to free the barrier and catch every one of the quiet tones beyond.

" And you leave us the day after to-morrow ? " said Mrs. Evelyn.

" No, Mrs. Evelyn, I shall wait another steamer."

The lady's brow instantly revealed to Fleda a trap setting beneath to catch his reason.

" You do not flatter us with a very long stay," pursued Mrs. Evelyn.

" Quite as long as I expected ; longer than I meant it to be," he answered rather thoughtfully.

"Mr. Carleton," said Constance, sidling up in front of him. "I have been in distress to ask you a question, and I am afraid——"

"Of what are you afraid, Miss Constance?"

"That you would reward me with one of your severe looks, which would petrify me, and then I am afraid I should feel uncomfortable——"

"I hope he will!" said Mrs. Evelyn, settling herself back in the corner of the sofa, and with a look at her daughter which was complacency itself. "I hope Mr. Carleton will, if you are guilty of any impertinence."

"What is the question, Miss Constance?"

"I want to know what brought you out here?"

"Fie, Constance!" said her mother. "I am ashamed of you. Do not answer her, Mr. Carleton."

"Mr. Carleton will answer me, mamma, he looks benevolently upon my faults, which are entirely those of education! What was it, Mr. Carleton?"

"I suppose," said he, smiling, "it might be traced more or less remotely to the restlessness incident to human nature."

"But *you* are not restless, Mr. Carleton," said Florence, with a glance which might be taken as complimentary.

"And knowing that I am," said Constance, in comic impatience, "you are maliciously prolonging my agonies. It is not what I expected of you, Mr. Carleton."

"My dear," said her father, "Mr. Carleton, I am sure, will fulfil all reasonable expectations. What is the matter?"

"I asked him where a certain tribe of Indians were to be found, papa, and he told me they were supposed originally to have come across Behring's Straits one cold winter."

Mr. Evelyn looked a little doubtfully at Constance with so unhesitating gravity that the gravity of nobody else was worth talking about.

"But it is so uncommon," said Mrs. Evelyn, when they had done laughing, "to see an Englishman of your class here at all, that when he comes a second time we may be forgiven for wondering what has procured us such an honour."

"Women may always be forgiven for wondering, my dear," said Mr. Evelyn, "or the rest of mankind must live at odds with them."

"Your principal object was to visit our western prairies, wasn't it, Mr. Carleton?" said Florence.

"No," he replied quietly, "I cannot say that. I should choose to give a less romantic explanation of my movements.

From some knowledge growing out of my former visit to this country I thought there were certain negotiations I might enter into here with advantage; and it was for the purpose of attending to these, Miss Constance, that I came."

"And have you succeeded?" said Mrs. Evelyn, with an expression of benevolent interest.

"No, ma'am, my information has not been sufficient."

"Very likely!" said Mr. Evelyn. "There isn't one man in a hundred whose representations on such a matter are to be trusted at a distance."

"On such a matter!" repeated his wife funnily, "you don't know what the matter was, Mr. Evelyn; you don't know what you are talking about."

"Business, my dear, business; I take only what Mr. Carleton said; it doesn't signify a straw what business. A man must always see with his own eyes."

Whether Mr. Carleton had seen or had not seen, or whether even he had his faculty of hearing in present exercise, a glance at his face was incompetent to discover.

"I never should have imagined," said Constance, eyeing him keenly, "that Mr. Carleton's errand to this country was one of business and not of romance. *I* believe it's a humbug."

For an instant this was answered by one of those looks of absolute composure in every muscle and feature which put an effectual bar to all further attempts from without or revelations from within; a look Fleda remembered well, and felt even in her corner. But it presently relaxed, and he said with his usual manner—

"You cannot understand then, Miss Constance, that there should be any romance about business?"

"I cannot understand," said Mrs. Evelyn, "why romance should not come after business. Mr. Carleton, sir, you have seen American scenery this summer—isn't American beauty worth staying a little while longer for?"

"My dear," said Mr. Evelyn, "Mr. Carleton is too much of a philosopher to care about beauty—every man of sense is."

"I am sure he is not," said Mrs. Evelyn smoothly. "Mr. Carleton, you are an admirer of beauty, are you not, sir?"

"I hope so, Mrs. Evelyn," he said, smiling, "but perhaps I shock you by adding, not of *beauties*."

"But let us understand," said Mrs. Evelyn, with the air of a person solving a problem—"I suppose we are to infer that your taste in beauty is of a peculiar kind?"

"That may be a fair inference," he said.

"What is it then?" said Constance eagerly.

"Yes, what is it you look for in a face?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Let us hear whether America has any chance," said Mr. Thorn, who had just joined the group and placed himself precisely so as to hinder Fleda's view.

"My fancy has no stamp of nationality, in this, at least," he said pleasantly.

"Now for instance, the Miss Delancys—don't you call them handsome, Mr. Carleton?" said Florence.

"Yes," he said, half smiling.

"But not beautiful? Now what is it they want?"

"I do not wish, if I could, to make the want visible to other eyes than my own."

"Well, Cornelia Schenck,—how do you like her face?"

"It is very pretty-featured."

"Pretty-featured? Why she is called beautiful. She has a beautiful smile, Mr. Carleton?"

"She has only one."

"Only one! and how many smiles ought the same person to have?" cried Florence impatiently. But that which instantly answered her said forcibly that a plurality of them was possible.

"I have seen one face," he said gravely, and his eye seeking the floor,—"that had, I think, a thousand."

"Different smiles?" said Mrs. Evelyn, in a constrained voice.

"If they were not all absolutely that, they had so much of freshness and variety that they all seemed new."

"But still, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, "this is only in general, I want very much to know the particulars; what style of features belonged to this face?"

"The fairest, I think, I have ever known," said Mr. Carleton.

"And, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, "is it fair to ask—this paragon—is she living still?"

"I hope so," he answered, with his own light smile, dismissing the subject.

"You spoke so much in the past tense," said Mrs. Evelyn apologetically.

"Yes, I have not seen it since it was a child's."

"A child's face! Oh!" said Florence, "I think you see a great many children's faces with that kind of look."

"I never saw but the one," said Mr. Carleton dryly.

So far Fleda listened, with cheeks highly flushed, and feeling it impossible to make her appearance in public that

evening, she quietly slipped out of the open window close by, which led into a little greenhouse on the piazza, and by another door gained the hall and the dressing-room.

When Dr. Gregory came to Mrs. Evelyn's an hour or two after, a figure all cloaked and hooded ran downstairs and met him in the hall.

"Ready!" said the doctor in surprise.

"I have been ready some time, sir," said Fleda.

She clasped her uncle's arm and walked with him briskly home.

"Did you have a pleasant evening?" said the doctor when they were about half way.

"Not particularly, sir," said Fleda hesitatingly.

He said not another word till they got home, and Fleda went up to her room. But the habit of patience overcame the wish to cry; and though the outside of her little gold-clasped Bible awoke it again, a few words of the inside were enough to lay it quietly to sleep.

"Well," said the doctor as they sat at breakfast the next morning, "where are you going next?"

"To the concert, I must, to-night," said Fleda. "I couldn't help myself."

"Why should you want to help yourself?" said the doctor. "And to Mrs. Thorn's to-morrow night?"

"No, sir, I believe not."

"I believe you will," said he, looking at her.

"I am sure I should enjoy myself more at home, uncle Orrin. There is very little rational pleasure to be had in these assemblages."

"Rational pleasure!" said he. "Didn't you have any rational pleasure last night?"

"I didn't hear a single word spoken, sir, that was worth listening to,—at least that was spoken to me; and the hollow kind of rattle that one hears from every tongue makes me more tired than anything else, I believe;—I am out of tune with it somehow."

"Out of tune!" said the old doctor, giving her a look made up of humourous vexation and real sadness,—"I wish I knew the right turning key to take hold of you."

"I become harmonious rapidly, uncle Orrin, when I am in this pleasant little room alone with you."

"That won't do?" said he, shaking his head at the smile with which this was said; "there is too much tension upon the strings. So that was the reason you were all ready waiting

for me last night? Well, you must tune up, my little piece of discordance, and go with me to Mrs. Thorn's to-morrow night—I won't let you off."

"With you, sir!" said Fleda.

"Yes," he said, "I'll go along and take care of you lest you get drawn into something else you don't like."

They were in their seats early. Fleda managed successfully to place the two Evelyns between her and Mr. Thorn, and then prepared herself to wear out the evening with patience.

"My dear Fleda!" whispered Constance, after some time spent in restless reconnoitring of everybody and everything,—"I don't see my English rose anywhere!"

"Hush!" said Fleda, smiling. "That happened not to be an English rose, Constance."

"What was it?"

"American, unfortunately; it was a Noisette; the variety, I think, that they call 'Conque de Venus.'"

"My dear little Fleda, you're too wise for anything!" said Constance, with a rather significant arching of her eyebrows. "You mustn't expect other people to be as rural in their acquirements as yourself. I don't pretend to know any rose by sight but the Queechy," she said, with a change of expression meant to cover the former one.

Fleda's face, however, did not call for any apology. It was perfectly quiet.

"But what has become of him?" said Constance, with her comic impatience. "My dear Fleda! if my eyes cannot rest upon that development of elegance the parterre is become a wilderness to me!"

"Hush, Constance!" Fleda whispered earnestly; "you are not safe—he may be near you."

"Safe!" ejaculated Constance; but a half backward hasty glance of her eye brought home so strong an impression that the person in question was seated a little behind her that she dared not venture another look, and became straightway extremely well-behaved.

He was there; and being presently convinced that he was in the neighbourhood of his little friend of former days he resolved with his own excellent eyes to test the truth of the opinion he had formed as to the natural and inevitable effect of circumstances upon her character; whether it could by possibility have retained its great delicacy and refinement

under the rough handling and unkindly bearing of things seemingly foreign to both. He had thought not.

Perhaps he would have made some attempt that very evening towards satisfying himself; but noticing that in coming out Thorn permitted the Evelyns to pass him and attached himself determinedly to Fleda, he drew back, and resolved to make his observations indirectly and on more than one point before he should seem to make them at all.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Hark! I hear the sound of coaches,
The hour of attack approaches.—*Gay.*

MRS. PRITCHARD had arrayed Fleda in the white muslin, with an amount of satisfaction and admiration that all the lines of her face were insufficient to express.

"Now," she said, "you must just run down and let the doctor see you—afore you take the shine off—or he won't be able to look at anything else when you get to the place."

"That would be unfortunate!" said Fleda, and she ran down laughing into the room where the doctor was waiting for her; but her astonished eyes encountering the figure of Dr. Quackenboss she stopped short, with an air that no woman of the world could have bettered. The physician of Queechy on his part was at least equally taken aback.

"Dr. Quackenboss!" said Fleda.

"I—I was going to say, Miss Ringgan," said the doctor, with a most unaffected obeisance; "but—a—I am afraid, sir, it is a deceptive influence!"

"I hope not," said Dr. Gregory, smiling, one corner of his mouth for his guest and the other for his niece. "Real enough to do real execution, or I am mistaken, sir."

"Upon my word, sir," said Dr. Quackenboss, bowing again. "I hope—a—Miss Ringgan!—will remember the acts of her executive power at home, and return in time to prevent an unfortunate termination!"

Dr. Gregory laughed heartily now, while Fleda's cheeks relieved her dress to admiration.

"Who will complain of her if she don't?" said the doctor. "Who will complain of her if she don't?"

But Fleda put in her question.

"How are you all in Queechy, Dr. Quackenboss?" said Fleda.

"I—have the pleasure to say—we are coming along as usual," replied the doctor, who seemed to have lost his power of standing up straight. Mr. Rossitur has come home."

"Uncle Rolf! Has he!" exclaimed Fleda, the colour of joy quite supplanting the other. "Oh, I'm very glad!"

"Yes," said the doctor, "he's been home now—I guess, going on four days."

"I am very glad!" repeated Fleda. "But won't you come and see me another time, Dr. Quackenboss? I am obliged to go out."

The doctor professed his great willingness, adding that he had only come down to the city to do two or three chores, and thought she might perhaps like to take the opportunity, which would afford him such very great gratification.

"No, indeed, faire Una," said Dr. Gregory, when they were on their way to Mrs. Thorn's, "they've got your uncle at home now, and we've got you; and I mean to keep you till I'm satisfied. So you may bring home that eye that has been squinting at Queechy ever since you have been here and make up your mind to enjoy yourself; I shan't let you go till you do."

"I ought to enjoy myself, uncle Orrin," said Fleda, squeezing his arm gratefully.

"See you do," said he.

The pleasant news from home had given Fleda's spirits the needed spur, which the quick walk to Mrs. Thorn's did not take off.

"Did you ever see Fleda look so well, mamma?" said Florence, as the former entered the drawing-room.

"That is the loveliest and best face in the room," said Mr. Evelyn, "and she looks like herself to-night."

"How Mrs. Thorn does look at her!" said Constance, under her breath. "It is too much!"

It was almost too much for Fleda's equanimity, for the colour began to come.

"And there goes Mr. Carleton!" said Constance. "I expect momentarily to hear the company strike up 'Sparkling and bright.'"

"They should have done that some time ago, Miss Constance," said the gentleman.

Which compliment, however, Constance received with hardly disguised scorn, and turned her attention again to Mr. Carleton.

"I trust I do not need presentation," said his voice, and his smile at once, as he presented himself to Fleda.

How little he needed it the flash of feeling that met his eyes said sufficiently well. But apparently the feeling was a little too deep, for the colour mounted and the eyes fell, and the smile suddenly died on the lips. Mr. Thorn came up to them, and releasing her hand, Mr. Carleton stepped back and permitted him to lead her away.

"What do you think of *that* face?" said Constance, finding herself a few moments after at his side.

"'That' must define itself," said he, "or I can hardly give a safe answer."

"What face? Why, I mean of course the one Mr. Thorn carried off just now."

"You are her friend, Miss Constance," he said coolly. "May I ask for your judgment upon it before I give mine?"

"Mine? Why, I expected every minute that Mr. Thorn would make the musicians play 'Sparkling and bright,' and tell Miss Ringgan that to save trouble he had directed them to express what he was sure were the sentiments of the whole company in one burst."

He smiled a little, but in a way that Constance could not understand and did not like.

He led her out of it into the conservatory, close to which they found themselves. It was a large and fine one, terminating the suite of rooms in this direction. Few people were there; but at the far end stood a group among whom Fleda and Mr. Thorn were conspicuous. He was busying himself in putting together a quantity of flowers for her; and Mrs. Evelyn and old Mr. Thorn stood looking on; with Mr. Stackpole. Mr. Stackpole was an Englishman, of certainly not very prepossessing exterior, but somewhat noted as an author and a good deal sought after in consequence. At present he was engaged by Mrs. Evelyn. Mr. Carleton and

Constance sauntered up towards them and paused at a little distance to look at some curious plants.

"Don't try for that, Mr. Thorn," said Fleda, as the gentleman was making rather ticklish efforts to reach a superb fuchsia that hung high. "You are endangering sundry things besides yourself."

"I have learned, Miss Fleda," said Thorn, as with much ado he grasped the beautiful cluster, "that what we take the most pains for is apt to be reckoned the best prize, a truth I should never think of putting into a lady's head if I believed it possible that a single one of them was ignorant of its practical value."

"I have this same rose in my garden at home," said Fleda.

"You are a great gardener, Miss Fleda, I hear," said the old gentleman. "My son says you are an adept in it."

"I am very fond of it, sir," said Fleda, answering *him* with an entirely different face.

"I thought the delicacy of American ladies was beyond such a masculine employment as gardening," said Mr. Stackpole, edging away from Mrs. Evelyn.

"I guess this young lady is an exception to the rule," said old Mr. Thorn.

"I guess she is an exception to most rules that you have got in your note-book, Mr. Stackpole," said the younger man.

"But there is no guessing about the garden, for I have with my own eyes seen these gentle hands at one end of a spade and her foot at the other; a sight that—I declare I don't know whether I was most filled with astonishment or admiration!"

"Yes," said Fleda, half laughing and colouring, "and he ingenuously confessed in his surprise that he didn't know whether politeness ought to oblige him to stop and shake hands or to pass by without seeing me; evidently shewing that he thought I was about something equivocal."

The laugh was now turned against Mr. Thorn, but he went on cutting his geraniums with a grave face.

"Well," said he at length, "I think it *is* something of very equivocal utility. Why should such gentle hands and feet spend their strength in clod-breaking, when rough ones are at command?"

There was nothing equivocal about Fleda's merriment this time.

"I have learned, Mr. Thorn, by sad experience, that these rough hands break more than the clods. One day I set Philetus

to work among my flowers; and the first thing I knew he had pulled up a fine passion-flower which didn't make much show above ground and was displaying it to me with the grave commentary, 'Well! that root did grow to a great haghth!'"

"Some mental clod-breaking to be done up there, isn't there?" said Thorn, in a kind of aside. "I cannot express my admiration at the idea of your dealing with those boors, as it has been described to me."

"They do not deserve the name, Mr. Thorn," said Fleda. "They are many of them most sensible and excellent people, and friends that I value very highly."

"Ah, your goodness would make friends of everything."

"Not of boors, I hope," said Fleda coolly. "Besides, what do you mean by the name?"

"Anybody incapable of appreciating that of which you alone should be unconscious," he said softly.

Fleda stood impatiently tapping her flowers against her left hand.

"I doubt their power of appreciation reaches a point that would surprise you, sir."

"It does indeed, if I am mistaken in my supposition," he said with a glance which Fleda refused to acknowledge.

"What proportion do you suppose," she went on, "of all these roomfuls of people behind us,—without saying anything uncharitable,—what proportion of them, if compelled to amuse themselves for two hours at a bookcase, would pitch upon Macaulay's Essays, or anything like them, to spend the time?"

"Hum—really, Miss Fleda," said Thorn, "I should want to brush up my Algebra considerably before I could hope to find x, y, and z in such a confusion of the alphabet."

"Or extract the small sensible root of such a quantity of light matter," said Mr. Stackpole.

"Will you bear with my vindication of my country friends? Hugh and I sent for a carpenter to make some new arrangements of shelves in a cupboard where we kept our books; he was one of these boors, Mr. Thorn, in no respect above the rest. The right stuff for his work was wanting, and while it was sent for he took up one of the volumes that were lying about and read perseveringly until the messenger returned. It was a volume of Macaulay's Miscellanies; and afterwards he borrowed the book of me."

"And you lent it to him?" said Constance.

"Most assuredly! and with a great deal of pleasure."

"And is this no more than a common instance, Miss Ringgan?" said Mr. Carleton.

"No, I think not," said Fleda; the quick blood in her cheeks again answering the familiar voice and old associations; "I know several of the farmers' daughters around us that have studied Latin and Greek; and philosophy is a common thing; and I am sure there is more sense——"

She suddenly checked herself, and her eye, which had been sparkling, grew quiet.

"It is very absurd!" said Mr. Stackpole.

"Why, sir?"

"Oh, these people have nothing to do with such things—do them nothing but harm!"

"May I ask again, what harm?" said Fleda gently.

"Unfit them for the duties of their station and make them discontented with it."

"By making it pleasanter?"

"No, no—not by making it pleasanter."

"By what then, Mr. Stackpole?" said Thorn, to draw him on and to draw her out, Fleda was sure.

"By lifting them out of it."

"And what objection to lifting them out of it?" said Thorn.

"You can't lift everybody out of it," said the gentleman, with a little irritation in his manner,—"that station must be filled—there must always be poor people."

"And what degree of poverty ought to debar a man from the pleasures of education and a cultivated taste? such as he can attain?"

"No, no, not that," said Mr. Stackpole; "but it all goes to fill them with absurd notions about their place in society inconsistent with proper subordination."

Fleda looked at him, but shook her head slightly and was silent.

"Things are in very different order on our side the water," said Mr. Stackpole, hugging himself.

"Are they?" said Fleda.

"Yes; we understand how to keep things in their places a little better."

"I did not know," said Fleda quietly, "that it was by *design* of the rulers of England that so many of her lower class are in the intellectual condition of our slaves."

"Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, laughing, "what do you say to that, sir?"

Fleda's face turned suddenly to him with a quick look of apology, which she immediately knew was not needed.

"But this kind of thing don't make the people any happier," pursued Mr. Stackpole; "it only serves to give them uppish and dissatisfied longings that cannot be gratified."

"Somebody says," observed Thorn, "that 'under a despotism all are contented because none can get on, and in a republic none are contented because all can get on.'"

"Precisely," said Mr. Stackpole.

"That might do very well if the world were in a state of perfection," said Fleda. "As it is, commend me to discontent and getting on. And the uppishness I am afraid is a national fault, sir; you know our state motto is 'Excelsior.'"

"We are at liberty to suppose," said Thorn, "that Miss Ringgan has followed the example of her friends the farmers' daughters? or led them in it?"

"It is dangerous to make surmises," said Fleda, colouring.

"It is a pleasant way of running into danger," said Mr. Thorn, who was leisurely pruning the prickles from the stem of a rose.

"I was talking to a gentleman once," said Fleda, "about the birds and flowers we find in our wilds; and he told me afterwards gravely that he was afraid I was studying too many things at once! when I was innocent of all ornithology but what my eyes and ears had picked up in the woods; except some childish reminiscences of Audubon."

"That is just the right sort of learning for a lady," said Mr. Stackpole, smiling at her, however; "women have nothing to do with books."

"What do you say to that, Miss Fleda?" said Thorn.

"Nothing, sir; it is one of those positions that are unanswerable."

"But, Mr. Stackpole," said Mrs. Evelyn, "I don't like that doctrine, sir. I do not believe in it at all."

"That is unfortunate for my doctrine," said the gentleman.

"But I do not believe it is yours. Why must women have nothing to do with books? what harm do they do, Mr. Stackpole?"

"Not needed, ma'am; a woman, as somebody says, knows intuitively all that is really worth knowing."

"Of what use is a mine that is never worked?" said Mr. Carleton.

"It *is* worked," said Mr. Stackpole. "Domestic life is the true training for the female mind. One woman will learn more

wisdom from the child on her breast than another will learn from ten thousand volumes."

"It is very doubtful how much wisdom the child will ever learn from her," said Mr. Carleton, smiling.

"A woman, who never saw a book," pursued Mr. Stackpole, unconsciously quoting his author, "may be infinitely superior, even in all those matters of which books treat, to the woman who has read and read intelligently a whole library."

"Unquestionably, and it is likewise beyond question that a silver sixpence may be worth more than a washed guinea."

"But a woman's true sphere is in her family—in her home duties, which furnish the best and most appropriate training for her faculties—pointed out by nature itself."

"Yes!" said Mr. Carleton, "and for those duties, some of the very highest and noblest that are entrusted to human agency, the fine machinery that is to perform them should be wrought to its last point of perfectness. The wealth of a woman's mind, instead of lying in the rough, should be richly brought out and fashioned for its various ends, while yet those ends are in the future, or it will never meet the demands. And for her own happiness, all the more because her sphere is at home, her home stores should be exhaustless—the stores she cannot go abroad to seek. I would add to strength beauty, and to beauty grace, in the intellectual proportions, so far as possible. It were ungenerous in man to condemn the *best* half of human intellect to insignificance merely because it is not his own."

"Very pleasant doctrine to the ears that have an interest in it!" said Mr. Stackpole rather discontentedly.

"The man knows little of his own interest," said Mr. Carleton, "who would leave that ground waste, or would cultivate it only in the narrow spirit of a utilitarian. He needs an influence in his family not more refreshing than rectifying; and no man will seek that in one greatly his inferior. He is to be pitied who cannot fall back upon his home with the assurance that he has there something better than himself."

"Why, Mr. Carleton, sir," said Mrs. Evelyn, with every line of her mouth saying funny things,—"I am afraid you have sadly neglected your own interest—have you anything at Carleton better than yourself?"

Suddenly cool again, he laughed and said, "You were there, Mrs. Evelyn."

"But, Mr. Carleton," pursued the lady, with a mixture of insinuation and fun, "why were you never married?"

"Circumstances have always forbade it," he answered, with a smile which Constance declared was the most fascinating thing she ever saw in her life.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Have you observed a sitting hare,
List'ning, and fearful of the storm
Of horns and hounds, clap back her ear,
Afraid to keep or leave her form?—*Prior.*

By the Evelyn's own desire Fleda's going to them was delayed for a week, because, they said, a furnace was to be brought into the house and they would be all topsy-turvy till that fuss was over. Fleda kept herself very quiet in the meantime, seeing almost nobody but the person whom it was her especial object to shun. Do her best she could not quite escape him, and was even drawn into two or three walks and rides; in spite of denying herself utterly to gentlemen at home, and losing in consequence a visit from her old friend. She was glad at last to go to the Evelyns and see company again, hoping that Mr. Thorn would be merged in a crowd.

But she could not merge him; and sometimes was almost inclined to suspect that his constant prominence in the picture must be owing to some mysterious and wilful conjuration going on in the background. She was at a loss to conceive how else it happened that despite her utmost endeavours to the contrary she was so often thrown upon his care and obliged to take up with his company. It was very disagreeable. Mr. Carleton she saw almost as constantly, but though frequently near she had never much to do with him. There

seemed to be a dividing atmosphere always in the way; and whenever he did speak to her she felt miserably constrained and unable to appear like herself. Why was it? she asked herself in a very vexed state of mind. No doubt partly from the remembrance of that overheard conversation which she could not help applying, but much more from an indefinable sense that at these times there were always eyes upon her. She tried to charge the feeling upon her consciousness of their having heard that same talk, but it would not the more go off. And it had no chance to wear off, for somehow the occasions never lasted long; something was sure to break them up; while an unfortunate combination of circumstances, or of connivers, seemed to give Mr. Thorn unlimited facilities in the same kind. Fleda was quick-witted and skilful enough to work herself out of them once in a while; more often the combination was too much for her simplicity and straightforwardness.

She was a little disappointed and a little surprised at Mr. Carleton's coolness. He was quite equal to withstand or outgeneral the schemes of any set of manœuvres; therefore it was plain he did not care for the society of his little friend and companion of old time. Fleda felt it, especially as she now and then heard him in delightful talk with somebody else; making himself so interesting that when Fleda could get a chance to listen she was quite ready to forgive his not talking to her for the pleasure of hearing him talk at all. But at other times she said sorrowfully to herself, "He will be going home presently, and I shall not have seen him!"

One day she had successfully defended herself against taking a drive which Mr. Thorn came to propose, though the proposition had been laughingly backed by Mrs. Evelyn. Raillery was much harder to withstand than persuasion; but Fleda's quiet resolution had proved a match for both. The better to cover her ground, she declined to go out at all, and remained at home the only one of the family that fine day.

In the afternoon Mr. Carleton was there. Fleda sat a little apart from the rest, industriously bending over a complicated piece of embroidery belonging to Constance, and in which that young lady had made a great blunder which she declared her patience unequal to the task of rectifying. The conversation went gaily forward among the others; Fleda taking no part in it beyond an involuntary one. Mr. Carleton's part was rather reserved and grave, according to his manner in ordinary society.

"Mr. Carleton," said Edith, who was treading with laudable success in the steps of her sister Constance, "what has become of that ride you promised to give me?"

"I do not know, Miss Edith," said Mr. Carleton, smiling, "for my conscience never had the keeping of it."

"Hush, Edith!" said her mother. "Do you think Mr. Carleton has nothing to do but to take you riding?"

"I don't believe he has much to do," said Edith securely. "But Mr. Carleton, you did promise, for I asked you and you said nothing; and I always have been told that silence gives consent; so what is to become of it?"

"Will you go now, Miss Edith?"

"Now? O, yes! And will you go out to Manhattanville, Mr. Carleton? along by the river?"

"If you like. But, Miss Edith, the carriage will hold another—cannot you persuade one of these ladies to go with us."

"Fleda!" said Edith, springing off to her with extravagant capers of joy, "Fleda, you shall go! you haven't been out to-day."

"And I cannot go out to-day," said Fleda, gently.

"The air is very fine," said Mr. Carleton, approaching her table, with no want of alacrity in step or tone, her ears knew; "and this weather makes everything beautiful—has that piece of canvas any claims upon you that cannot be put aside for a little?"

"No, sir," said Fleda, "but—I am sorry I have a stronger reason that must keep me at home."

"She knows how the weather looks," said Edith, "Mr. Thorn takes her out every other day. It's no use to talk to her, Mr. Carleton; when she says she won't, she won't."

"Every other day!" said Fleda.

"No, no," said Mrs. Evelyn, coming up, and with that smile which Fleda had never liked so little as at that minute—"not *every other day*, Edith, what are you talking of? Go, and don't keep Mr. Carleton waiting."

Fleda worked on, feeling a little aggrieved. Mr. Carleton stood still by her table, watching her, while his companions were getting themselves ready; but he said no more, and Fleda did not raise her head till the party were off. Florence had taken her resigned place.

"I dare say the weather will be quite as fine to-morrow, dear Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn softly.

"I hope it will," said Fleda in a tone of resolute simplicity.

"I only hope it will not bring too great a throng of carriages to the door," Mrs. Evelyn went on in a tone of great internal amusement; "I never used to mind it, but I have lately a nervous fear of collisions."

"To-morrow is not your reception-day," said Fleda.

"No, not mine," said Mrs. Evelyn softly—"but that doesn't signify—it may be one of my neighbours'." Fleda pulled away at her threads of worsted and wouldn't know anything else.

"I have read of the servants of Lot and the servants of Abraham quarrelling," Mrs. Evelyn went on in the same undertone of delight,—"because the land was too straight for them—I should be very sorry to have anything of the sort happen again, for I cannot imagine where Lot would go to find a plain that would suit him."

"Lot and Abraham, mamma!" said Constance from the sofa, "what on earth are you talking about?"

"None of your business," said Mrs. Evelyn; "I was talking of some country friends of mine that you don't know."

Constance knew her mother's laugh very well; but Mrs. Evelyn was impenetrable.

The next day Fleda was dressing for dinner with Constance's company and help when Mrs. Evelyn came into her room.

"My dear Fleda," said the lady, her face and voice as full as possible of fun, "Mr. Carleton wants to know if you will ride with him this afternoon. I told him I believed you were in general shy of gentlemen who drove their own horses—that I thought I had noticed you were,—but I would come up and see."

"Mrs. Evelyn!—you did not tell him that?"

"He said he was sorry to see you looked pale yesterday when he was asking you; and he was afraid that embroidery is not good for you. He thinks you are a very charming girl!"

And Mrs. Evelyn went off into little fits of laughter which unstrung all Fleda's nerves. She stood absolutely trembling.

"Mamma! don't plague her!" said Constance. "He didn't say so."

"He did! upon my word!" said Mrs. Evelyn, speaking with great difficulty; "he said she was very charming, and it might be dangerous to see too much of her."

"You made him say that, Mrs. Evelyn!" said Fleda reproachfully.

"Well, I did ask him if you were not very charming, but

he answered without hesitation," said the lady. "I am only so afraid that Lot will make his appearance!"

Fleda turned round to the glass, and went on arranging her hair, with a quivering lip.

"Lot, mamma!" said Constance somewhat indignantly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Evelyn in ecstasies,—"because the land will not bear both of them. But Mr. Carleton is very much in earnest for his answer, Fleda, my dear—what shall I tell him? You need be under no apprehensions about going—he will perhaps tell you that you are charming, but I don't think he will say anything more. You know he is a kind of patriarch! And when I asked him if he didn't think it might be dangerous to see too much of you, he said he thought it might to some people—so you see you are safe."

"Mrs. Evelyn, how could you use my name so!" said Fleda, with a voice that carried a good deal of reproach.

"My dear Fleda, shall I tell him you will go? You need not be afraid to go riding, only you must not let yourself be seen walking with him."

"I shall not go, ma'am," said Fleda quietly.

"I wanted to send Edith with you, thinking it would be pleasanter; but I knew Mr. Carleton's carriage would hold but two to-day. So what shall I tell him?"

"I am not going, ma'am," repeated Fleda.

"My dear Fleda," said the lady, bringing her face a little into order, "won't you go? I am very sorry——"

"So am I sorry," said Fleda. "I can't go, Mrs. Evelyn."

"I will tell Mr. Carleton you are very sorry," said Mrs. Evelyn, every line of her face drawing again, "that will console him. I will tell him you are a good Republican, and have an objection at present to an English equipage, but I have no doubt that this is a prejudice which will wear off."

She stopped to laugh, while Fleda had the greatest difficulty not to cry. The lady did not seem to see her disturbed brow; but recovering herself after a little, though not readily, she bent forward and touched her lips to it in kind fashion. Fleda did not look up; and saying again, "I will tell him, dear Fleda!" Mrs. Evelyn left the room.

Constance, after a little laughing and condoling, neither of which Fleda attempted to answer, ran off too, to dress herself; and Fleda, after finishing her own toilette, locked her door, sat down, and cried heartily. She was sorry she had lost what would have been a great pleasure in the ride,—and her great pleasures were not often,—but nothing would have been

more impossible than for her to go after what Mrs. Evelyn had said; she was sorry Mr. Carleton should have asked her twice in vain; what must he think? she was exceeding sorry that a thought should have been put into her head that never before had visited the most distant dreams of her imagination,—so needlessly, so gratuitously; she was very sorry, for she could not be free of it again, and she felt it would make her miserably hampered and constrained in mind and manner both, in any future intercourse with the person in question. And then again, what would he think of that?

She went down to dinner with no traces of either tears or unkindness on her sweet face, but her nerves were quivering all the afternoon; she could not tell whether Mrs. Evelyn and her daughters found it out. And it was impossible for her to get back even her old degree of freedom of manner before either Mr. Carleton or Mr. Thorn. All the more because Mrs. Evelyn was every now and then bringing out some sly allusion which afforded herself intense delight and wrought Fleda to the last degree of quietness. Unkind! Fleda thought now it was but half from ignorance of the mischief she was doing, and the other half from the mere desire of selfish gratification. The times and ways in which Lot and Abraham were walked into the conversation were incalculable and unintelligible, except to the person who understood it only too well.

One steamer had left New York, and another, and still Mr. Carleton did not leave it. Why he staid, Constance was as much in a puzzle as ever, for no mortal could guess. Clearly, she said, he did not delight in New York Society, for he honoured it as slightly and partially as might be, and it was equally clear if he had a particular reason for staying, he didn't mean anybody should know it.

Fleda did not wonder that Mr. Carleton made no more efforts to get her to ride, for the very next day after his last failure he had met her driving with Mr. Thorn. Fleda had been asked by Mr. Thorn's mother in such a way as made it impossible to get off; but it caused her to set a fresh seal of unkindness to Mrs. Evelyn's behaviour.

One evening when there was no other company at Mrs. Evelyn's, Mr. Stackpole was entertaining himself with a long dissertation upon the affairs of America, past, present, and future.

"This is the land of the stars and the stripes!" said the gentleman in a little fit of virtuous indignation. "This is the

land where all are brothers!—where 'All men are born free and equal.'"

"Mr. Stackpole," said Fleda, in a tone that called his attention,—"are you well acquainted with the popular proverbs of your country?"

"Not particularly," he said, "he had never made it a branch of study."

"Do you remember this one, sir," said Fleda, colouring a little—'Those that live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones'?"

"I have heard it; but, pardon me, though your remark seems to imply the contrary, I am in the dark yet. What unfortunate points of vitrification have I laid open to your fire?"

"I thought they were probably forgotten by you, sir."

"I shall be exceedingly obliged to you if you would put me in condition to defend myself."

"I think nothing could do that, Mr. Stackpole. Under whose auspices and fostering care was this curse of slavery laid upon America?"

"Why, of course, but you will observe, Miss Ringgan, that at that day the world was unenlightened on a great many points; since then *we* have cast off the wrong which we then shared with the rest of mankind."

"Ay, sir, but not until we had first repudiated it, and Englishmen had desired to force it back upon us at the point of the sword. Four times."

"But, my dear Fleda," interrupted Mrs. Evelyn, "the English nation have no slaves nor slave trade—they have put an end to slavery entirely everywhere under their flag."

"They were very slow about it," said Fleda. "Four times the government of Massachusetts abolished the slave trade under their control, and four times the English government thrust it back upon them. Do you remember what Burke says about that in his speech on Conciliation with America?"

"It don't signify what Burke says about it," said Mr. Stackpole, rubbing his chin. "Burke is not the first authority—but, Miss Ringgan, it is undeniable that slavery and the slave-trade too does at this moment exist in the interior of your own country."

"I will never excuse what is wrong, sir; but I think it becomes an Englishman to be very moderate in putting forth that charge."

"Why," said he hastily, "we have done away with it

entirely in our own dominions; wiped that stain clear off. Not a slave can touch British ground but he breathes free air from that minute."

"Yes, sir, but candour will allow that we are not in a condition in this country to decide the question by a *tour de force*."

"What is to decide it then?" said he a little arrogantly.

"The progress of truth in public opinion."

"And why not the government, as well as our government."

"It has not the power, you know, sir."

"Not the power! Well, that speaks for itself."

"Nothing against us, on a fair construction," said Fleda patiently. "It is well known, to those who understand the subject——"

"Where did you learn so much about it, Fleda?" said Mrs. Evelyn humorously.

"As the birds pick up their supplies, ma'am—here and there. It is well known, Mr. Stackpole, that our constitution never could have been agreed upon if that question of slavery had not been by common consent left where it was—with the separate state governments."

"The separate state governments—well, why do not *they* put an end to it? The disgrace is only shifted."

"Of course, they must first have the consent of the public mind of those states."

"Ah! their consent! and why is their consent wanting?"

"We cannot defend ourselves there," said Mrs. Evelyn. "I wish we could."

"The disgrace at least is shifted from the whole to a part. But will you permit me," said Fleda, "to give another quotation from my despised authority, and remind you of an Englishman's testimony, that beyond a doubt that point of emancipation would never have been carried in parliament had the interest of even a part of the electors been concerned in it."

"It was done, however, and done at the expense of twenty millions of money."

"I do not wish to dispute it," said Fleda; "but still it was doing what did not touch the sensitive point of their own well-being."

"*We* think there is a little national honour concerned in it," said Mr. Stackpole, dryly, stroking his chin again.

"So does every right-minded person," said Mrs. Evelyn; "I am sure I do."

"And I am sure so do I," said Fleda; "but I think the honour of a piece of generosity is considerably lessened by the fact that it is done at the expense of another."

"Generosity!" said Mr. Stackpole, "it was not generosity, it was justice; there was no generosity about it."

"Then it deserves no honour at all," said Fleda, "if it was merely that—the tardy execution of justice is but the removal of a reproach."

"We Englishmen are of opinion, however," said Mr. Stackpole contentedly, "that the removers of a reproach are entitled to some honour which those who persist in retaining it cannot claim."

"Yes," said Fleda, drawing rather a long breath, "I acknowledge that; but I think that while some of these same Englishmen have shown themselves so unwilling to have the condition of their own factory slaves ameliorated, they should be very gentle in speaking of the wrongs which we have far less ability to rectify."

"Ah! I like consistency," said Mr. Stackpole. "America shouldn't dress up poles with liberty caps till all who walk under are free to wear them. She cannot boast that the breath of her air and the breath of freedom are one."

"Can England?" said Fleda gently, "when her own citizens are not free from the horrors of impressment?"

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Stackpole, half in a pet and half laughing, "why where did you get such a fury against England? You are the first *fair* antagonist I have met on this side of the water."

"I wish I was a better one, sir," said Fleda, laughing.

"Miss Ringgan has been prejudiced by an acquaintance with one or two unfortunate specimens," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Ay!" said Mr. Stackpole a little bitterly, "America is the natural birthplace of prejudice, always was."

"Displayed first, in maintaining the rights against the swords of Englishmen; latterly, how, Mr. Stackpole?"

"It isn't necessary to enlighten *you* on any part of the subject," said he a little pointedly.

"Fleda, my dear, you are answered!" said Mrs. Evelyn, apparently with great internal amusement.

"Yet you will indulge me so far as to indicate what part of the subject you are upon?" said Fleda quietly.

"You must grant so much as that to so gentle a requisition, Mr. Stackpole," said the older lady.

"I venture to assume that you do not say that on your own account, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Not at all—I agree with you, that Americans are prejudiced; but I think it will pass off, Mr. Stackpole, as they learn to know themselves and other countries better."

"But how do they deserve such a charge and such a defence? or how have they deserved it?" said Fleda.

"Tell her, Mr. Stackpole," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Why," said Mr. Stackpole, "in their absurd opposition to all the old and tried forms of things, and rancorous dislike of those who uphold them; and in their pertinacity on every point where they might be set right, and impatience of hearing the truth."

"Are they singular in that last item?" said Fleda.

"Now," said Mr. Stackpole, not heeding her, "there's your treatment of the aborigines of this country—what do you call that, for a *free* people?"

"A powder magazine, communicating with a great one of your own somewhere else; so if you are a good subject, sir, you will not carry a lighted candle into it."

"One of our own—where?" said he.

"In India," said Fleda, with a glance, "and there are I don't know how many trains leading to it, so better hands off, sir."

"Where did you pick up such a spite against us!" said Mr. Stackpole, drawing a little back and eyeing her as one would a belligerent mouse or cricket. "Will you tell me now that Americans are not prejudiced?"

"What do you call prejudice?" said Fleda, smiling.

"Oh, there is a great deal of it, no doubt, here, Mr. Stackpole," said Mrs. Evelyn blandly; "but we shall grow out of it in time; it is only the premature wisdom of a young people."

"And young people never like to hear their wisdom rebuked," said Mr. Stackpole, bowing.

"Fleda, my dear, what for is that little significant shake of your head?" said Mrs. Evelyn in her amused voice—"A trifle, ma'am."

"Covers a hidden rebuke, Mrs. Evelyn, I have no doubt, for both our last remarks. What is it, Miss Fleda? I dare say we can bear it."

"I was thinking, sir, that none would trouble themselves much about our foolscap if we had not once made them wear it."

"Mr. Stackpole, you are worsted! I only wish Mr. Carleton had been here!" said Mrs. Evelyn, with a face of excessive delight.

"I wish he had," said Fleda, "for then I need not have spoken a word."

"Why," said Mr. Stackpole, a little irritated, "you suppose he would have fought for you against me?"—"I suppose he would have fought for truth against anybody, sir," said Fleda.

"Even against his own interests?"

"If I am not mistaken in him," said Fleda, "he reckons his own and those of truth identical."

The shout that was raised at this by all the ladies of the family made her look up in wonderment.

"Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, "what do you say to that, sir?"

The direction of the lady's eye made Fleda spring up and face about. The gentleman in question was standing quietly at the back of her chair, too quietly, she saw, to leave any doubts of his having been there some time. Mr. Stackpole uttered an ejaculation, but Fleda stood absolutely motionless, and nothing could be prettier than her colour.

"What do you say to what you have heard, Mr. Carleton?" said Mrs. Evelyn. Fleda's eyes were on the floor, but she thoroughly appreciated the tone of the question.

"I hardly know whether I have listened with most pleasure or pain, Mrs. Evelyn."

"Pleasure!" said Constance.

"Pain!" said Mr. Stackpole.

"I am certain Miss Ringgan was pure from any intention of giving pain," said Mrs. Evelyn, with her voice of contained fun. "She has no national antipathies, I am sure, unless in the case of the Jews, she is too charming a girl for that."

"Miss Ringgan cannot regret less than I a word that she has spoken," said Mr. Carleton, looking keenly at her as she drew back and took a seat a little from the rest.

"Then why was the pain?" said Mr. Stackpole.

"That there should have been any occasion for them, sir."

"Well, I wasn't sensible of the occasion, so I didn't feel the pain," said Mr. Stackpole dryly, for the other gentleman's tone was almost haughtily significant. "But if I had, the pleasure of such sparkling eyes would have made me forget it. Good-evening, Mrs. Evelyn—good-evening, my gentle antagonist,—it seems to me you have learned, if it is

permissible to alter one of your favourite proverbs, that it is possible to *break two windows* with one stone. However, I don't feel that I go away with any of mine shattered."

"Fleda, my dear," said Mrs. Evelyn, laughing, "what do you say to that?"—"As he is not here I will say nothing to it, Mrs. Evelyn," said Fleda, quietly drawing off to the table with her work, and again in a tremor from head to foot.

"Why, didn't you see Mr. Carleton come in?" said Edith, following her; "I did—he came in long before you had done talking, and mamma held up her finger and made him stop; and he stood at the back of your chair the whole time listening. Mr. Stackpole didn't know he was there either. But what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Fleda, but she made her escape out of the room the next instant.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It is a hard matter for friends to meet; but mountains may be removed with earthquakes, and so encounter.—*As You Like It.*

"WHAT have we to do to-night?" said Florence at breakfast the next morning.

"You have no engagement, have you?" said her mother.

"No, mamma," said Constance, arching her eyebrows. "We are to taste the sweets of domestic life—you, as head of the family, will go to sleep in the dormeuse, and Florence and I shall take turns in yawning by your side."

"And what will Fleda?" said Mrs. Evelyn, laughing.

"Fleda, mamma, will be wrapped in remorseful recollection of having enacted a mob last evening, and have enough occupation in considering how she shall repair damages."

"Fleda, my dear, she is very saucy," said Mrs. Evelyn, sipping her tea with great comfort.

"Why should we yawn to-night any more than last night?" said Fleda; a question which Edith would certainly have

asked if she had not been away at school. The breakfast was too late for both her and her father.

"Last night, my dear, your fractious disposition kept us upon half breath; there wasn't time to yawn. I meant to have eased my breast by laughing afterwards, but that expectation was stifled."

"What stifled it?"—"I was afraid!" said Constance, with a little flutter of her person up and down in her chair.

"Afraid of what?"

"And besides you know we can't have our drawing-room filled with distinguished foreigners *every* evening we are not at home. I shall direct the fowling-piece to be severe in his execution of orders to-night and let nobody in. I forgot!" exclaimed Constance with another flutter. "It is Mr. Thorn's night! My dearest mamma, will you consent to have the dormeuse wheeled round with its back to the fire? and Florence and I will take the opportunity to hear little Edith's lessons in the next room—unless Mr. Decatur comes. I must endeavour to make the Manton comprehend what he has to do."

After dinner Fleda set out to pay a visit to her uncle at the library; she had resolved that she would not be near the dormeuse in whatsoever relative position that evening. Very, very quiet she was; her grave little face walked through the crowd of busy, bustling, anxious people, as if she had nothing in common with them; and Fleda felt that she had very little. Half unconsciously, as she passed along the streets, her eye scanned the countenances of that moving panorama; and the report it brought back made her draw closer within herself. She wondered that her feet had ever tripped lightly up those library stairs.

"Ha! my fair Saxon," said the doctor; "what has brought you down here to-day?" — "I felt in want of something fresh, uncle Orrin, so I thought I would come and see you."

"Fresh!" said he. "Ah, you are pining for green fields, I know. But you little piece of simplicity, there are no green fields now at Queechy—they are two feet deep with snow by this time."

"Well, I am sure *that* is fresh," said Fleda, smiling.

The doctor was turning over great volumes one after another in a delightful confusion of business.

"When do you think you shall go north, uncle Orrin?"

"North?" said he, "what do you want to know about the North?"

"You said, you know, sir, that you would go a little out of your way to leave me at home."

"I won't go out of my way for anybody. If I leave you there it will be in my way. Why, you are not getting home-sick?"

"No, sir, not exactly, but I think I will go with you when you go."

"That won't be yet awhile—I thought those people wanted you to stay till January."

"Ay, but suppose I want to do something else?"

He looked at her with a comical kind of indecision, and said—

"You don't know what you want! I thought when you came in you needn't go further than the glass to see something fresh; but I believe the sea breezes haven't had enough of you yet. Which part of you wants freshening?" he said in his mock-fierce way.

Fleda laughed and said she didn't know.

"Out of humour, I guess," said the doctor. "I'll talk to you! Take this and amuse yourself awhile with something that *isn't* fresh, till I get through, and then you shall go home with me."

Fleda carried the large volume into one of the reading-rooms, where there was nobody, and sat down at the baize-covered table. But the book was not of the right kind—or her mood was not—for it failed to interest her. She sat nonchalantly turning over the leaves; but mentally she was busy turning over other leaves which had by far most of her attention. The pages that memory read—the record of the old times passed in that very room, and the old childish light-hearted feelings that were, she thought, as much beyond recall.

"What pleasant times we used to have here once, uncle Orrin!" she said, with half a sigh, the other half quite made up by the tone in which she spoke. But it was not, as she thought, uncle Orrin that was standing by her side, and looking up as she finished speaking Fleda saw with a start that it was Mr. Carleton. There was such a degree of life and pleasantness in his eyes that, in spite of the start, her own quite brightened.

"That is a pleasure one may always command," he said, answering part of her speech.

"Ay, provided one has one's mind always under command," said Fleda. "It is possible to sit down to a feast with a want of appetite."

"In such a case, what is the best tonic?" His manner,

even in those two minutes, had put Fleda perfectly at her ease, ill-bred eyes and ears being absent. She looked up and answered, with such entire trust in him as made her forget that she had ever had any cause to distrust herself.

"For me," she said, "as a general rule, nothing is better than to go out of doors, into the woods or the garden, they are the best fresheners I know of. I can do myself good there at times when books are a nuisance."

"You are not changed from your old self," he said.

The wish was strong upon Fleda to know whether *he* was, but it was not till she saw the answer in his face that she knew how plainly hers had asked the question. And then she was so confused that she did not know what the answer had been.

"I find it so too," he said. "The influences of pure nature are the best thing I know for some moods—after the company of a good horse."

"And you on his back, I suppose?"

"That was my meaning. What is the doubt thereupon?" said he, laughing.

"Did I express any doubt?"—"Or my eyes were mistaken."

"I remember they never used to be that," said Fleda.

"What was it?"

"Why," said Fleda, thinking that Mr. Carleton had probably retained more than one of his old habits, for she was answering with her old obedience, "I was doubting what the influence is in that case—worth analyzing, I think, I am afraid the good horse's company has little to do with it."

"What then do you suppose?" said he smiling.

"Why," said Fleda, "it might be—but I beg your pardon, Mr. Carleton. I am astonished at my own presumption."

"Go on, and let me know why?" he said, with that happiness of manner which was never resisted. Fleda went on, reassuring her courage now and then with a glance.

"The relief *might* spring, sir, from the gratification of a proud feeling of independence, or from a dignified sense of isolation, or an imaginary riding down of opposition, or the consciousness of being master of what you have in hand."

She would have added to the general category, "the running away from oneself"; but the eye and bearing of the person before her forbade even such a thought as connected with him. He laughed, but shook his head.

"Perhaps then," said Fleda, "it may be nothing worse

than the working off of a surplus of energy or impatience, that leaves behind no more than can be managed."

"You have learned something of human nature since I had the pleasure of knowing you," he said, with a look at once amused and penetrating.

"I wish I hadn't," said Fleda.

Her countenance absolutely fell.

"I sometimes think," said he, turning over the leaves of her book, "that these are the best companionship one can have, the world at large is very unsatisfactory."

"O, how much!" said Fleda, with a long breath. "The only pleasant thing that my eyes rested upon as I came through the streets this afternoon, was a huge bunch of violets that somebody was carrying. I walked behind them as long as I could."

"Is your old love for Queechy in full force?" said Mr. Carleton, still turning over the leaves, and smiling.

"I believe so; I should be very sorry to live here long, at home I can always go out and find society that refreshes me."

"You have set yourself a high standard," he said, with no displeased expression of the lips.

"I have been charged with that," said Fleda; "but is it possible to set too high a standard, Mr. Carleton?"

"One may leave oneself almost alone in the world."

"Well, even then," said Fleda, "I would rather have only the image of excellence than be contented with inferiority."

"Isn't it possible to do both?" said he, smiling again.

"I don't know," said Fleda, "perhaps I am too easily dissatisfied. I believe I have grown fastidious living alone. I have sometimes almost a disgust at the world and everything in it."

"I have often felt so," he said, "but I am not sure that it is a mood to be indulged in, likely to further our own good or that of others."

"I am sure it is not," said Fleda. "I often feel vexed with myself for it; but what can one do, Mr. Carleton?"

"Don't your friends the flowers help you in this?"

"Not a bit," said Fleda. "They draw the other way; their society is so very pure and satisfying that one is all the less inclined to take up with the other." She could not quite tell what to make of the smile with which he began to speak; it half abashed her.

"When I spoke a little while ago," said he, "of the best cure for an ill mood, I was speaking of secondary means

simply, the only really humanizing, rectifying, peace-giving thing I ever tried was looking at time in the light of eternity, and shaming or melting my coldness away in the rays of the Sun of righteousness."

Fleda's eyes, which had fallen on her book, were raised again with such a flash of feeling that it quite prevented her seeing what was in his. But the feeling was a little too strong, the eyes went down, lower than ever, and the features shewed that the utmost efforts of self-command were needed to control them.

"There is no other cure," he went on in the same tone; "but disgust and weariness and selfishness shrink away and hide themselves before a word or a look of the Redeemer of men. When we hear him say, 'I have bought thee, thou are mine,' it is like one of those old words of healing, 'Thou are loosed from thine infirmity,' 'Be thou clean,' and the mind takes sweetly the grace and the command together, 'That he who loveth God love his brother also.' Only the preparation of the gospel of peace can make our feet go softly over the roughness of the way." Fleda did not move, unless her twinkling eyelashes might seem to contradict that.

"I need not tell you," Mr. Carleton went on a little lower, "where this medicine is to be sought."

"It is strange," said Fleda presently, "how well one may know and how well one may forget. But I think the body has a great deal to do with it sometimes—these states of feeling, I mean."

"No doubt it has; and in these cases the cure is a more complicated matter. I should think the roses would be useful there?"

Fleda's mind was crossed by an indistinct vision of peas, asparagus, and sweet corn; she said nothing.

"An indirect remedy is sometimes the very best that can be employed. However it is always true that the more our eyes are fixed upon the source of light the less we notice the shadows that things we are passing fling across our way." Fleda did not know how to talk for a little while; she was too happy. Whatever kept Mr. Carleton from talking, he was silent also. Perhaps it was the understanding of her mood.

"Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, after a little time, "did you ever carry out that plan of a rose-garden that you were talking of a long while ago?"

"You remember it!" said he, with a pleased look. "Yes, that was one of the first things I set about after I went home, but I did not follow the regular fashion of arrangement that one of your friends is so fond of."

"I should not like that for anything," said Fleda, "and least of all for roses."

"Do you remember the little shrubbery path that opened just in front of the library windows, leading at the distance of half a mile in a long narrow winding glen?"

"Perfectly well!" said Fleda, "through the wood of evergreens. Oh, I remember the glen very well!"

"About half way from the house," said he, smiling at her eyes, "a glade opens which merges at last in the head of the glen—I planted my roses there—the circumstances of the ground were very happy for disposing them according to my wish."

"And how far?"

"The roses?—O, all the way, and some distance down the glen. Not a continuous thicket of them." He added, smiling again, "I wished each kind to stand so that its peculiar beauty should be fully relieved and appreciated; and that would have been lost in a crowd."

"Yes, I know it," said Fleda; "one's eye rests upon the chief objects of attraction and the others are hardly seen; they do not even serve as foils. And they must shew beautifully against that dark background of firs and larches!"

"Yes, and the windings of the ground gave me every sort of situation and exposure. I wanted room too for the different effects of masses of the same kind growing together and of fine individuals or groups standing alone where they could shew the full graceful development of their nature."

"What a pleasure! What a beauty it must be!"

A discussion followed on the manner of pruning various roses, and on the curious connection between care and complacency, and the philosophy of the same.

"The rules of the library are to shut up at sundown, sir," said one of the bookmen who had come into the room.

"Sundown!" exclaimed Fleda, jumping up; "is my uncle not here, Mr. Frost?"

"He has been gone half an hour, ma'am."

"And I was to have gone home with him—I have forgotten myself."

"If that is at all the fault of my roses," said Mr. Carleton, smiling, "I will do my best to repair it."

"I am not disposed to call it a fault," said Fleda, tying her bonnet-strings; "it is rather an agreeable thing once in a while. I shall dream of those roses, Mr. Carleton!"

"That would be doing them too much honour."

Very happily she had forgotten herself; and during all the walk home her mind was too full of one great piece of joy and, indeed, too much engaged with conversation to take up her own subject again. Her only wish was that they might not meet any of the Evelyns; Mr. Thorn, whom they did meet, was a matter of entire indifference. The door was opened by Dr. Gregory himself. To Fleda's utter astonishment, Mr. Carleton accepted his invitation to come in. She went upstairs to take off her things in a kind of maze.

"I thought he would go away without my seeing him, and now what a nice time I have had! in spite of Mrs. Evelyn——" That thought slipped in without Fleda's knowledge, but she could not get it out again.

"I don't know how much it has been her fault either, but one thing is certain, I never could have it at her house. How very glad I am! How *very* glad I am! that I have seen him and heard all this from his own lips. But how very funny that he will be here to tea."

"Well!" said the doctor when she came down, "you *do* look freshened up, I declare. Here is this girl, sir, was coming to me a little while ago complaining that she wanted something *fresh*, and begging me to take her back to Queechy, forsooth, to find it with two feet of snow on the ground. Who wants to see you at Queechy?" he said, facing round upon her with a look half fierce half quizzical.

Fleda laughed, but was vexed to feel that she could not help colouring and colouring exceedingly; partly from the consciousness of his meaning, and partly from a vague notion that somebody else was conscious of it too. Dr. Gregory, however, dashed right off into the thick of conversation with his guest, and kept him busily engaged till tea-time. Fleda sat still on the sofa, looking and listening with simple pleasure; memory served her up a rich entertainment enough. Yet she thought her uncle was the most heartily interested of the two in the conversation; there was a shade more upon Mr. Carleton, not that he often wore, but than he had worn a little while ago. Dr. Gregory was a great bibliopole, and in the course of the hour hauled out and made his guest overhaul

no less than seventy musty old folios; and Fleda could not help fancying that he did it with an access of gravity greater even than the occasion called for

"I have been so unfortunate in the matter of the drives," Mr. Carleton said, when he was about to take leave and standing before Fleda, "that I am half afraid to mention it again."

"I could not help it, both those times, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda earnestly.

"Both the last? or both the first?" said he, smiling.

"The last!" said Fleda.

"I have had the honour of making such an attempt twice within the last ten days—to my disappointment."

"It was not by my fault then either, sir," said Fleda quietly. But he knew very well from the expression of her face a moment before where to put the emphasis her tongue would not make.

"Dare I ask you to go with me to-morrow?"

"I don't know," said Fleda, with the old childish sparkle of her eye,—"but if you ask me, sir, I will go."

He sat down beside her immediately, and Fleda knew by his change of eye that her former thought had been right.

"Shall I see you at Mrs. Decatur's to-morrow?"—"No, sir."

"I thought I understood," said he in an explanatory tone, "from your friends, the Miss Evelyns, that they were going."

"I believe they are, and I did think of it; but I have changed my mind, and shall stay at home with Mrs. Evelyn." After some further conversation the hour for the drive was appointed, and Mr. Carleton took leave.

"Come for me twice and Mrs. Evelyn refused without consulting me!" thought Fleda. "What could make her do so? How very rude he must have thought me! And how glad I am I have had an opportunity of setting that right." So quitting Mrs. Evelyn, her thoughts went off upon a long train of wandering over the afternoon's talk.

"Wake up!" said the doctor, laying his hand kindly upon her shoulder, "you'll want something fresh again presently. What mine of profundity are you digging into now?"

Fleda looked up and came back from her profundity with a glance and smile as simple as a child's.

"Dear uncle Orrin, how came you to leave me alone in the library?"

"Was that what you were trying to discover?"

"Oh, no, sir! But why did you, uncle Orrin? I might have been left utterly alone."

"Why," said the doctor, "I was going out, and a friend that I thought I could confide in promised to take care of you."

"A friend! Nobody came near me," said Fleda.

"Then I'll never trust anybody again," said the doctor. "But what were you hammering at, mentally, just now? Come, you shall tell me."

"Oh, nothing, uncle Orrin," said Fleda, looking grave again, however. "I was thinking that I had been talking too much to-day."

"Talking too much? Why, whom have you been talking to?"

"Oh, nobody but Mr. Carleton."

"Mr. Carleton! why you didn't say six and a quarter words while he was here."

"No, but I mean in the library, and walking home."

"Talking too much! I thought you were too shy to talk at all in company."

"No, sir, I am not; I am not at all shy unless people frighten me. It takes almost nothing to do that; but I am very bold if I am not frightened."

"Were you frightened this afternoon?"—"No, sir."

"Well, if you weren't frightened, I guess nobody else was," said the doctor.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Whence came this ?
This is some token from a newer friend.—*Shakespeare.*

THE snow-flakes were falling softly and thick when Fleda got up the next morning.

"No ride for me to-day—but how very glad I am that I had a chance of setting that matter right. What could Mrs. Evelyn have been thinking of? Very false kindness! if I had disliked to go ever so much, she ought to have made me, for my own sake, rather than let me seem so rude—it is true she didn't know *how* rude. Oh, snow-flakes—how much purer and prettier you are than most things in this place!"

"Are you going to Mrs. Decatur's to-night, Fleda?" asked Edith, while the family were at breakfast.

"No, I believe not."

"I'm very glad; then there'll be somebody at home. But why don't you?"

"I think on the whole I had rather not."

"Mamma," said Constance, "you have done very wrong in permitting such a thing. I know just how it will be. Mr. Thorn and Mr. Stackpole will make indefinite voyages of discovery round Mrs. Decatur's rooms, and then having a glimmering perception that the light of Miss Ringgan's eyes is in another direction they will sheer off; and you will presently see them come sailing blandly in, one after the other and cast anchor for the evening; when to your extreme delight Mr. Stackpole and Miss Ringgan will immediately commence fighting. I shall stay at home to see!" exclaimed Constance, with little bounds of delight up and down upon her chair, which this time afforded her the elasticity of springs, "I will not go. I am persuaded how it will be, and I would not miss it for anything."

"Dear Constance!" said Fleda, unable to help laughing through all her vexation, "please do not talk so! You know very well Mr. Stackpole only comes to see your mother."

"He was here last night," said Constance, in an extreme state of delight, "with all the rest of your admirers—ranged in the hall, with their hats in a pile at the foot of the staircase as a token of their determination not to go till you came home; and as they could not be induced to come up to the drawing-room, Mr. Evelyn was obliged to go down, and with

some difficulty persuaded them to disperse." Fleda was by this time in a state of indecision betwixt crying and laughing, assiduously attentive to her breakfast.

"Mr. Carleton asked me if you would go to ride with him again the other day, Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn, with her face of delighted mischief, "and I excused you; for I thought you would thank me for it."

"Mamma," said Constance, "the mention of that name rouses all the bitter feelings I am capable of! My dear Fleda—we have been friends—but if I see you abstracting my English rose——"

"That is what I call a bouquet," said Fleda, fain to draw near the tempting show in Florence's hand.

"This is the handsomest you have had all winter, Florence," said Edith.

"Handsomest! I never saw anything like it. I shall wear some of these to-night, mamma."

"You are in a great hurry to appropriate it," said Constance. "How do you know but it is mine."

"Which of us is it for, Joe?"

"Say it is mine, Joe, and I will vote you—the best article of your kind!" said Constance, with an inexpressible glance at Fleda.

"Who brought it, Joe?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Yes, Joe, who brought it? Where did it come from, Joe?"

Joe had hardly a chance to answer.

"I really couldn't say, Miss Florence; the man wasn't known to me."

"But did he say it was for Florence or for me?"

"No, ma'am; he——"

"*Which* did he say it was for?"—"He didn't say it was either for Miss Florence or for you, Miss Constance; he——"

"But didn't he say who sent it?"—No, ma'am. It's——"

"Mamma, here is a white moss that is beyond everything! with two of the most lovely buds. Oh!" said Constance, clasping her hands and whirling about the room in comic ecstasy, "I shan't survive it if I cannot find out where it is from!"

"How delicious the scent of these tea-roses is!" said Fleda. "You ought not to mind the snow-storm to-day after this, Florence. I should think you would be perfectly happy."

"I shall be, if I can contrive to keep them fresh to wear to-night. Mamma, how sweetly they would dress me."

"They're a great deal too good to be wasted so," said Mrs. Evelyn; "I shan't let you do it."

"Mamma! it wouldn't take any of them at all for my hair and the *bouquet de corsage* too—there'd be thousands left. Well, Joe, what are you waiting for?"

"I didn't say," said Joe, looking a good deal blank and a little afraid. "I should have said—that the bouquet—is——"

"What is it?"

"It is—I believe ma'am—the man said it was for Miss Ringgan."

"For me!" exclaimed Fleda, her cheeks forming instantly the most exquisite commentary on the gift that the giver could have desired. She took in her hand the superb bunch of flowers from which the fingers of Florence unclosed as if it had been an icicle.

"Why didn't you say so before?" she inquired sharply; but the "fowling-piece" had wisely disappeared.

"I am very glad!" exclaimed Edith. "They have had plenty all winter, and you haven't had one—I am very glad it is yours, Fleda."

But such a shadow had come upon every other face that Fleda's pleasure was completely overclouded. She smelled at her roses, just ready to burst into tears, and wishing sincerely that they had never come.

"I am afraid, my dear Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn, quietly going on with her breakfast, "that there is a thorn somewhere among those flowers."

Fleda was too sure of it. But not by any means the one Mrs. Evelyn intended.

"He never could have got half those from his own greenhouse, mamma," said Florence; "if he had cut every rose that was in it; and he isn't very free with his knife either."

"I said nothing about anybody's greenhouse," said Mrs. Evelyn, "though I don't suppose there is more than one Lot in the city they could have come from."

"Well," said Constance, settling herself back in her chair and closing her eyes, "I feel extinguished! Mamma, do you suppose it possible that a hot cup of tea might revive me? I am suffering from a universal sense of unappreciated merit! and nobody can tell what the pain is that hasn't felt it."

"I think you are extremely foolish, Constance," said Edith. "Fleda hasn't had a single flower sent her since she has been here and you have had them every other day. I

think Florence is the only one that has a right to be disappointed."

"Dear Florence," said Fleda earnestly, "you shall have as many of them as you please to dress yourself, and welcome!"

"Oh no—of course not!" Florence said. "It's of no sort of consequence—I don't want them in the least, my dear. I wonder what somebody would think to see his flowers in my head!"

Fleda secretly had mooted the same question and was very well pleased not to have it put to the proof. She took the flowers upstairs after breakfast, resolving that they should not be an eyesore to her friends; placed them in water, and sat down to enjoy and muse over them in a very sorrowful mood.

Florence went to Mrs. Decatur's; but Constance, according to her avowed determination, remained at home to see the fun. Fleda hoped most sincerely there would be none for her to see.

But a good deal to her astonishment, early in the evening, Mr. Carleton walked in, followed very soon by Mr. Thorn and Mr. Stackpole. Constance and Mrs. Evelyn were forthwith in a perfect effervescence of delight, which as they could not very well give it full play, promised to last the evening; and Fleda, all her nervous trembling awakened again, took her work to the table and endeavoured to bury herself in it. But ears could not be fastened as well as eyes, and the mere sound of Mrs. Evelyn's voice sometimes sent a thrill over her.

"Mr. Thorn," said the lady in her smoothest manner, "are you a lover of floriculture, sir?"

"Can't say that I am, Mrs. Evelyn, except as practised by others."

"Then you are not a connoisseur in roses? Miss Ringgan's happy lot sent her a most exquisite collection this morning, and she has been wanting to apply to somebody who could tell her what they are—I thought you might know. O, they are not here," said Mrs. Evelyn, as she noticed the gentleman's look round the room; "Miss Ringgan judges them too precious for any eyes but her own. Fleda, my dear, won't you bring down your roses to let Mr. Thorn tell us their names?"

"I am sure Mr. Thorn will excuse me, Mrs. Evelyn—I believe he would find it a puzzling task."

"The surest way, Mrs. Evelyn, would be to apply at the fountain-head for information," said Thorn drily.

"If I could get at it," said Mrs. Evelyn (Fleda knew with

quivering lips), "but it seems to me I might as well try to find the Dead Sea!"

"Perhaps Mr. Carleton might serve your purpose," said Thorn.

That gentleman was at the moment talking to Constance.

"Mr. Carleton—" said Mrs. Evelyn,—"are you a judge, sir?"

"Of what, Mrs. Evelyn? I beg your pardon."

The lady's tone somewhat lowered.

"Are you a judge of roses, Mr. Carleton?"

"So far as to know a rose when I see it," he answered, smiling, and with an imperturbable coolness that it quieted Fleda to hear.

"Ay, but the thing is," said Constance, "do you know twenty roses when you see them?"

"Miss Ringgan, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, "has received a most beautiful supply this morning; but like a true woman she is not satisfied to enjoy unless she can enjoy them intelligently—they are strangers to us all, and she would like to know what name to give them—Mr. Thorn suggested that perhaps you might help us out of our difficulty."

"With great pleasure, so far as I am able, if my judgment may be exercised by daylight. I cannot answer for shades of green in the night-time."

But he spoke with an ease and simplicity that left no mortal able to guess whether he had ever heard of a particular bunch of roses in his life before.

"Miss Ringgan, Mr. Stackpole," said Constance, "is subject to occasional fits of misanthrophy, in which cases her retreating with her work to the solitude of the centre-table is significant of her desire to avoid conversation, as Mr. Thorn has been experiencing."

"I am happy to see that the malady is not catching, Miss Constance."

"Mr. Stackpole!" said Constance, "I am in a morose state of mind! Miss Ringgan this morning received a magnificent bouquet of roses, which, in the first place, I rashly appropriated to myself; and ever since I discovered my mistake I have been meditating the renouncing of society—it has excited more bad feelings than I thought had existence in my nature."

"Mr. Stackpole," said Mrs. Evelyn, "would you ever have supposed that roses could be a cause of discord?" Mr. Stackpole looked as if he did not exactly know what the ladies were driving at.

"There have five thousand emigrants arrived at this port within a week!" said he, as if that were something worth talking about.

"Poor creatures! where will they all go?" said Mrs. Evelyn comfortably.

"Country's large enough," said Thorn.

"Yes, but such a stream of immigration will reach the Pacific and come back again before long; and then there will be a meeting of the waters! This tide of German and Irish will sweep over everything."

"I suppose if the land will not bear both, one party will have to seek other quarters," said Mrs. Evelyn, with an exquisite satisfaction which Fleda could hear in her voice. "You remember the story of Lot and Abraham, Mr. Stackpole,—when a quarrel arose between them? not about roses."

Mr. Stackpole looked as if women were—to say the least—incomprehensible. "Five thousand a week!" he repeated.

"I wish there was a Dead Sea for them all to sheer off into!" said Thorn.

"If you had seen the look of grave rebuke that speech called forth, Mr. Thorn," said Constance, "your feelings would have been penetrated, if you have any."

"I had forgotten," he said, looking round with a bland change of manner, "what gentle charities were so near me."

"Mamma!" said Constance with a most comic show of indignation, "Mr. Thorn thought that with Miss Ringgan he had forgotten all the gentle charities in the room! I am of no further use to society! I will trouble you to ring that bell, Mr. Thorn, if you please. I shall request candles and retire to the privacy of my own apartment!"

"Not till you have permitted me to expiate my fault!" said Mr. Thorn laughing.

"It cannot be expiated! My worth will be known at some future day. Mr. Carleton, *will* you have the goodness to summon our domestic attendant?"

"If you will permit me to give the order," he said, smiling, with his hand on the bell. "I am afraid you are hardly fit to be trusted alone."

"Why?"—"May I delay obeying you long enough to give my reasons?"

"Yes."

"Because," said he, coming up to her, "when people turn away from the world in disgust they generally find worse company in themselves."

"Mr. Carleton! I would not sit still another minute, if curiosity didn't keep me. I thought solitude was said to be such a corrector?"

"Like a clear atmosphere—an excellent medium if your object is to take an observation of your position—worse than lost if you mean to shut up the windows and burn sickly lights of your own."

"Then according to that one shouldn't seek solitude unless one doesn't want it."

"No," said Mr. Carleton, with that eye of deep meaning to which Constance always rendered involuntary homage, "every one wants it; if we do not daily take an observation to find where we are, we are sailing about wildly and do not know whither we are going."

"An observation?" said Constance, understanding part and impatient of not catching the whole of his meaning.

"Yes," he said, with a smile of singular fascination,—"I mean, consulting the unerring guides of the way to know where we are and if we are sailing safely and happily in the right direction—otherwise we are in danger of striking upon some rock or of never making the harbour; and in either case, all is lost."

The power of eye and smile was too much for Constance, as it had happened more than once before; her own eyes fell and for a moment she wore a look of unwonted sadness and sweetness, at what from any other person would have roused her mockery.

"Mr. Carleton," said she, trying to rally herself but still not daring to look up, knowing that would put it out of her power, "I can't understand how you ever came to be such a grave person."

"What is your idea of gravity?" said he, smiling. "To have a mind so at rest about the future as to be able to enjoy thoroughly all that is worth enjoying in the present?"

"But I can't imagine how *you* ever came to take up such notions."

"May I ask again, why not I?"

"Oh, you know—you have so much to make you otherwise."

"What degree of present contentment ought to make one satisfied to leave that of the limitless future an uncertain thing."

"Do you think it can be made certain?"

"Undoubtedly!—why not? The tickets are free—the only thing is to make sure that ours has the true signature.

Do you think the possession of that ticket makes life a sadder thing? The very handwriting of it is more precious to me, by far, Miss Constance, than everything else I have."

"But you are a very uncommon instance," said Constance, still unable to look up, and speaking without any of her usual attempt at jocularity.

"No, I hope not," he said quietly.

"I mean," said Constance, "that it is very uncommon language to hear from a person like you."

"I suppose I know your meaning," he said after a minute's pause,—"but, Miss Constance, there is hardly a graver thought to me than that power and responsibility go hand in hand."

"It don't generally work so," said Constance rather uneasily.

Thorn had kept quiet for two reasons—that he might not displease Fleda, and that he might watch her. She had left her work, and turning half round from the table had listened intently to the conversation, towards the last very forgetful that there might be anybody to observe her, with eyes fixed, and cheeks flushing, and the corners of the mouth just indicating delight, till the silence fell; and then she turned round to the table and took up her worsted-work. But the lips were quite grave now, and Thorn's keen eye discerned that upon one or two of the artificial roses there lay two or three very natural drops.

"Mr. Carleton," said Edith, "what makes you talk such sober things? You have set Miss Ringgan to crying."

"Mr. Carleton could not be better pleased than at such a tribute to his eloquence," said Mr. Thorn with a saturnine expression.

"Smiles are common things," said Mr. Stackpole, a little maliciously; "but any man may be flattered to find his words drop diamonds."

"Fleda, my dear," said Mrs. Evelyn, with that trembling tone of concealed ecstasy which always set every one of Fleda's nerves ajarring; "you may tell the gentlemen that they do not always know when they are making an unfelicitous compliment. I never read what poets say about 'briny drops,' and 'salt tears' without imagining the heroine immediately to be something like Lot's wife;"

"Nobody said anything about briny drops, mamma," said Edith. "Why, there's Florence!" Her entrance made a little bustle, which Fleda was very glad of. Unkind! She was trembling again in every finger. She bent down over her canvas and worked away as hard as she could. That did

not hinder her becoming aware presently that Mr. Carleton was standing close beside her.

"Are you not trying your eyes?" said he.

The words were nothing, but the tone was a great deal; there was a kind of quiet intelligence in it. Fleda looked up, and something in the clear, steady, self-reliant eye she met wrought an instant change in her feeling. She met it a moment and then looked at her work again with nerves quieted. "Cannot I persuade them to be of my mind?" said Mr. Carleton, bending down a little nearer to their sphere of action.

"Mr. Carleton is unreasonable to require more testimony of that this evening," said Mr. Thorn; "his own must have been ill-employed."

Fleda did not look up, but the absolute quietness of Mr. Carleton's manner could be felt; she felt it, almost with sympathetic pain. Thorn immediately left them and took leave.

"What are you searching for in the papers, Mr. Carleton?" said Mrs. Evelyn, presently coming up to them.

"I was looking for the steamers, Mrs. Evelyn."

"How soon do you think of bidding us good-bye?"

"I do not know, ma'am," he answered coolly, "I expect my mother."

Mrs. Evelyn walked back to her sofa. But in the space of two minutes she came over to the centre-table again, with an open magazine in her hand.

"Mr. Carleton," said the lady, "you must read this for me and tell me what you think of it, will you, sir? I have been showing it to Mr. Stackpole and he can't see any beauty in it, and I tell him it is his fault and there is some serious want in his composition. Now I want to know what you will say to it."

"An arbiter, Mrs. Evelyn, should be chosen by both parties."

"Read it and tell me what you think," repeated the lady, walking away to leave him opportunity. Mr. Carleton looked it over.

"That is something pretty," he said, putting it before Fleda. Mrs. Evelyn was still at a distance.

"What do you think of that print for trying the eyes?" said Fleda, laughing as she took it. But he noticed that her colour rose a little.

"How do you like it?"

"I like it—pretty well," said Fleda, rather hesitatingly.

"You have seen it before?"

"Why?" Fleda said, with a look up at him at once a little startled and a little curious; "what makes you say so?"

"Because—pardon me—you did not read it."

"Oh," said Fleda, laughing, but colouring at the same time very frankly, "I can tell how I like some things without reading them very carefully."

Mr. Carleton looked at her and then took the magazine again.

"What have you there, Mr. Carleton?" said Florence.

"A piece of English on which I was asking this lady's opinion, Miss Evelyn."

"Now, Mr. Carleton!" exclaimed Constance, jumping up, "I am going to ask you to decide a quarrel between Fleda and me about a point of English."

"Hush, Constance!" said her mother, "I want to speak to Mr. Carleton—Mr. Carleton, how do you like it?"

"Like what, mamma?" said Florence.

"A piece I gave Mr. Carleton to read. Mr. Carleton, tell me how you like it, sir."

"But what is it, mamma?"

"A piece of poetry in an old Excelsior—'The Spirit of the Fireside.' Mr. Carleton, tell me what you think of it."

"It has pleased me particularly, Mrs. Evelyn."

"Mr. Stackpole says he does not understand it, sir."

"Fanciful," said Mr. Stackpole,—"it's a little fanciful—and I can't quite make out what the fancy is."—"It has been the misfortune of many good things before not to be prized, Mr. Stackpole," said the lady funnily.

"True, ma'am," said that gentleman, rubbing his chin—"and the converse is also true unfortunately,—and with a much wider application."

"There is a peculiarity of mental development or training," said Mr. Carleton, "which must fail of pleasing many minds because of their wanting the corresponding key of nature or experience. Some literature has a hidden freemasonry of its own."

"Very hidden indeed!" said Mr. Stackpole; "the cloud is so thick that I can't see the electricity!"

"Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, laughing, "I take that remark as a compliment, sir—I have always appreciated that writer's pieces—I enjoy them very much."

"Who's the writer?" said Mr. Stackpole.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Evelyn. "It is signed 'Hugh'—there have been a good many of his pieces in the Excelsior for a year past—and all of them pretty."

"Hugh!" exclaimed Edith, springing forward. "That's the one that wrote the 'Chestnuts,' Fleda; won't you read Mr. Carleton the 'Chestnuts'?"

"Why no, Edith, I think not."

"Ah, do! I like it so much, and I want him to hear it, and you know mamma says they're all pretty. Won't you?"

"My dear Edith, you have heard it once already to-day."

"But I want you to read it for me again."

"Let me have it, Miss Edith," said Mr. Carleton, smiling. "I will read it for you."

"Ah, but it would be twice as good if you could hear her read it," said Edith, fluttering over the leaves of the magazine. "She reads it so well. It's so funny—about the coffee and buckwheat cakes."

"What is that, Edith?" said her mother.

"Something Mr. Carleton is going to read for me, mamma."

"Don't you trouble, Mr. Carleton."

"It won't trouble him, mamma—he promised of his own accord."

"Let us all have the benefit of it, Mr. Carleton," said the lady.

It is worthy of remark that Fleda's politeness utterly deserted her during the reading of the piece. She as near as possible turned her back upon the reader.

Whether it was from the reader's enjoyment or good giving of the lines or from Edith's delight in them, he was frequently interrupted with bursts of laughter.

"I can understand that," said Mr. Stackpole, "without any difficulty."

"You are not lost in the mysteries of chestnuting in open daylight," said Mrs. Evelyn.

"Mr. Carleton," said Edith, "wouldn't you have taken the squirrel's chestnuts?"

"I believe I should, Miss Edith, if I had not been hindered."

"But what would have hindered you? don't you think it was right?"

"Ask your friend, Miss Ringgan, what she thinks of it," said he, smiling.

"Now, Mr. Carleton," said Constance, as he threw down the magazine, "will you decide that point of English between Miss Ringgan and me?"

"I'll sleep upon that before I give my opinion," said Mr. Carleton. "Mrs. Evelyn, good evening!"

With the departure of Mr. Carleton, Fleda fell into silence, but she was roused from her reverie by Mrs. Evelyn.

"Fleda my dear, I am writing to your aunt Lucy—have you any message to send?

"No, Mrs. Evelyn—I wrote myself to-day."

And she went back to her musings.

"I am writing about you, Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn, again in a few minutes.

"Giving a good account, I hope, ma'am," said Fleda, smiling.

"I shall tell her I think sea-breezes have an unfavourable effect upon you," said Mrs. Evelyn; "that I am afraid you are growing pale; and that you have clearly expressed yourself in favour of a garden at Queechy rather than any lot in the city—or anywhere else; so she had better send for you home immediately."

Fleda tried to find out what the lady really meant; but Mrs. Evelyn's delighted amusement did not consist with making the matter very plain. Fleda's questions did nothing but aggravate the cause of them, to her own annoyance, so she was fain at last to take her light and go to her own room.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A snake bedded himself under the threshold of a country house.
—*L'Estrange.*

To Fleda's great satisfaction, Mr. Thorn was not seen again for several days.

One morning she was called down to see a gentleman, and came eschewing in advance the expected image of Mr. Thorn. It was a very different person. "Charlton Rossitur! My dear Charlton, how do you do? Where did you come from?"

"You had better ask me what I have come for," he said, laughing as he shook hands with her.

"What have you come for?"—"To carry you home."

"Home!" said Fleda. "I am going up there for a day or two, and mamma wrote me I had better act as your escort, which of course I am most willing to do. See what mamma says to you."

"When are you going, Charlton?" said Fleda, as she broke the seal of the note he gave her.—"To-morrow morning."

"That is too sudden a notice, Captain Rossitur," said Mrs. Evelyn. "Fleda will hurry herself out of her colour, and then your mother will say there is something in sea-breezes that isn't good for her; and then she will never trust her within reach of them again, which I am sure Miss Ringgan would be sorry for." Fleda took her note to the window, half angry with herself that a kind of banter in which certainly there was very little wit should have power enough to disturb her. But though the shaft might be a slight one it was winged with a will; the intensity of Mrs. Evelyn's enjoyment in her own mischief gave it all the force that was wanting. Fleda's head was in confusion; she read her aunt's note three times over before she had made up her mind on any point respecting it—

"My dearest Fleda,—Charlton is coming home for a day or two—hadn't you better take the opportunity to return with him? I feel as if you had been long away, my dear child—don't you feel so too? Your uncle is very desirous of seeing you; and as for Hugh and me we are but half ourselves. I would not still say a way about your coming home if it were for your good to stay; but I fancy from something in Mrs. Evelyn's letter that Queechy air will by this time do you good again; and opportunities of making the journey are very uncertain. My heart has grown lighter since I gave it leave to expect you.

"Yours, my darling,—L.R.

"P.S.—I will write to Mrs. E. soon."

"What string has pulled these wires that are twitching me home?" thought Fleda, as her eyes went over and over the words which the feeling of the lines of her face would alone have told her were unwelcome. And why unwelcome? "One likes to be moved by fair means and not by foul," was the immediate answer. "And besides, it is very disagreeable to be taken by surprise. Whenever, in any matter of my staying or going, did aunt Lucy have any wish but my pleasure?" Fleda mused a little while; and then with a

perfect understanding of the machinery that had been at work, though an extremely vague and repulsed notion of the spring that had moved it, she came quietly out from her window and told Charlton she would go with him.

"But not to-morrow?" said Mrs. Evelyn composedly. "You will not hurry her off so soon as that, Captain Rossitur."

"Furloughs are the stubbornest things in the world, Mrs. Evelyn; there is no spirit of accommodation about them. Mine lies between to-morrow morning and one other morning some two days thereafter; and you might as soon persuade Atlas to change his place. Will you be ready, coz.?"

"I will be ready," said Fleda, and her cousin departed.

After dinner she had just time to run down to the library to bid Dr. Gregory good-bye; her last walk in the city. It wasn't a walk she enjoyed much.

"Going to-morrow!" said he. "Why I am going to Boston in a week, you had better stay and go with me."—"I can't now, uncle Orrin; I am dislodged, and you know there is nothing to do then but to go."

"Come and stay with me till next week."

But Fleda said it was best not, and went home to finish her preparations.

She had no chance till late, for several gentlemen spent the evening with them. Mr. Carleton was there part of the time, but he was one of the first to go; and Fleda could not find an opportunity to say that she should not see him again. Her timidity would not allow her to make one. But it grieved her. At last she escaped to her own room, where most of the packing was still to do. By the time half the floor and all the bed was strewn with neat-looking piles of things, the varieties of her modest wardrobe, Florence and Constance came in to see and talk with her, and sat down on the floor too; partly perhaps because the chairs were all bespoken in the service of boxes and baskets, and partly to follow what seemed to be the prevailing style of things.

"What do you suppose has become of Mr. Thorn?" said Constance. "I have a presentiment that you will find him cracking nuts sociably with Mr. Rossitur, or drinking one of aunt Lucy's excellent cups of coffee—in comfortable expectation of your return."—"If I thought that, I should stay here," said Fleda. "My dear, those were *my* cups of coffee!"

"I wish I could make you think it then," said Constance.

"But you are glad to go home, aren't you, Fleda?" said Florence.

"She isn't!" said her sister. "She knows mamma contemplates making a grand entertainment of all the Jews as soon as she is gone. What *does* mamma mean by that, Fleda? I observe you comprehend her with most invariable quickness."

"I should be puzzled to explain all that your mother means," said Fleda gently, as she went on bestowing her things in the trunk. "No, I am not particularly glad to go home, but I fancy it is time. I am afraid I have grown too accustomed to your luxury of life and want knocking about to harden me a little."

"Harden you!" said Constance. "My dear Fleda, you are under a delusion. Why should anyone go through an indurating process? Will you inform me?"

"I don't say that everyone should," said Fleda; "but isn't it well for those whose lot does not lie among soft things?"

There was extreme sweetness and a touching insinuation in her manner, and both the young ladies were silent for some time hereafter, watching somewhat wistfully the gentle hands and face that were so quietly busy; till the room was cleared again and looked remarkably empty with Fleda's trunk standing in the middle of it. And then reminding them that she wanted some sleep to fit her for the hardening process, and must therefore send them away, she was left alone.

One thing Fleda had put off till then—the care of her bunch of flowers. They were beautiful still. They had given her a very great deal of pleasure; and she was determined they should be left to no servant's hands to be flung in the street. If it had been summer she was sure she could have got buds from them; as it was, perhaps she might strike some cuttings; at all events they should go home with her. So carefully taking them out of the water and wrapping the ends in some fresh earth she had got that very afternoon from her uncle's garden, Fleda bestowed them in the corner of her trunk that she had left for them, and went to bed, feeling weary in body, and in mind to the last degree quiet.

In the same mind and mood she reached Queechy the next afternoon. It was a little before January—just the same time that she had come home last year. As then, it was a bright day, and the country was again covered thick with the unspotted snow; but Fleda forgot to think how bright and fresh it was. Somehow she did not feel this time quite so glad to find herself there. It had never occurred to her so strongly before that Queechy could want anything.

This feeling flew away before the first glimpse of her aunt's smile, and for half an hour after Fleda would have certified that Queechy wanted nothing. At the end of that time came in Mr. Rossitur. His greeting of Charlton was sufficiently unmarked; but eye and lip wakened when he turned to Fleda. "My dear child," he said, holding her face in both his hands,—"how lovely you have grown!"—"That's only because you have forgotten her, father," said Hugh, laughing.

It was a very lovely face just then. Mr. Rossitur gazed into it a moment and again kissed first one cheek and then the other, and then suddenly withdrew his hands and turned away, with an air—Fleda could not tell what to make of it—an air that struck her with an immediate feeling of pain; somewhat as if for some cause or other he had nothing to do with her or her loveliness. And she needed not to see him walk the room for three minutes to know that Michigan agencies had done nothing to lighten his brow or uncloud his character. Her eyes watched him stealthily till she could bear it no longer. She resolved to bring the power of her sunbeam to bear, and, going round, seated herself on the sofa close by him and laid her hand on his arm. He felt it immediately. The arm was instantly drawn away to be put round her; and Fleda was pressed nearer to his side, while the other hand took hers: and his lips were again on her forehead.

"And how do you like me for a farmer, uncle Rolf?" she said, looking up at him laughingly, and then fearing immediately that she had chosen her subject ill. Not from any change in his countenance, however,—that decidedly brightened up. He did not answer at once.

"My child—you make me ashamed of mankind!"

"Of the dominant half of them, sir, do you mean?" said Charlton; "or is your observation a sweeping one?"

"It would sweep the greatest part of the world into the background, sir," answered his father dryly, "if its sense were the general rule."

"And what has Fleda done to be such a besom of desolation?"

Fleda's laugh set everybody else agoing, and there was immediately more life and common feeling in the society than had been all day. They all seemed willing to shake off a weight, and even Fleda, in the endeavour to chase the gloom that hung over others, as it had often happened, lost half of her own.

"But still I am not answered," said Charlton, when they

were grave again. "What has Fleda done to put such a libel upon mankind!"

"Insignificance," said his father dryly.

"I should like to know how bestowed," said Charlton.

"Don't enlighten him, uncle Rolf," said Fleda, laughing. "Let my doings remain in safe obscurity, please!"

"I stand as a representative of mankind," said Charlton, "and I demand an explanation."

"Look at what this slight frame and delicate nerves have been found equal to, and then tell me if the broad shoulders of your mess would have borne half the burden or their united heads accomplished a quarter the results." He spoke with sufficient depth of meaning, though now with no unpleasant expression. But Charlton notwithstanding gathered himself up.

"Oh, uncle Rolf," said Fleda gently,—"nerves and muscles haven't much to do with it—after all, you know I have just served the place of a mouthpiece. Seth was the head, and good Earl Douglass the hand."

"I am ashamed of myself and of mankind," Mr. Rossitur repeated, "when I see what mere weakness can do, and how proudly valueless strength is contented to be. You are looking, Captain Rossitur, but after all, a cap and plume really makes a man taller only to the eye."

"When I have flung my plume in anybody's face, sir," said Charlton rather hotly, "it will be time enough to throw it back again."

Mrs. Rossitur put her hand on his arm and looked her remonstrance.

"Are you glad to be home again, dear Fleda?" she said, turning to her.

But Fleda was making some smiling communications to her uncle and did not seem to hear.

"Fleda—does it seem pleasant to be here again?"—"Very pleasant, dear aunt Lucy—though I have had a very pleasant visit too."

"On the whole, you do not wish you were at this moment driving out of town in Mr. Thorn's cabriolet?" said her cousin.

"Not in the least," said Fleda coolly. "How did you know I ever did such a thing?"

"I wonder what should bring Mr. Thorn to Queechy at this time of year," said Hugh.—Fleda started at this confirmation of Constance's words; and what was very odd, she could not get rid of the impression that Mr. Rossitur had started too.

Perhaps it was only her own nerves, but he had certainly taken away the arm that was round her.

"I suppose he has followed Miss Ringgan," said Charlton gravely.

"No," said Hugh, "he has been here some little time."

"Then he preceded her, I suppose, to see and get the sleighs in order."

"He did not know I was coming," said Fleda.

"Didn't!"—"No—I have not seen him for several days."

"My dear little cousin," said Charlton laughing, "you are not a witch in your own affairs, whatever you may be in those of other people."

"Why, Charlton?"

"You are no adept in the art of concealment."

"I have nothing to conceal," said Fleda. "How do you know he is here, Hugh?"

"I was anxiously asked the other day," said Hugh, with a slight smile, "whether you had come home; and then told that Mr. Thorn was in Queechy. There is no mistake about it, for my informant had actually seen him, and given him the direction to Mr. Plumfield's, for which he was inquiring."

"The direction of Mr. Plumfield's!" said Fleda.

"What's your old friend Mr. Carleton doing in New York?" said Charlton.—"Is he there still?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Large as life," answered her son.

"Which, though you might not suppose it, aunt Lucy, is about the height of Captain Rossitur, with—I should judge—a trifle less weight."

"Your eyes are observant!" said Charlton.

"Of a good many things," said Fleda lightly.

"He is *not* my height by half an inch," said Charlton; "I am just six feet without my boots."—"An excellent height!" said Fleda, "'your six feet was ever the only height."

"Who said that?" said Charlton.

"Isn't it enough that I say it?"

"What's he staying here for?"—"I don't know, really," said Fleda. "It's very difficult to tell what people do things for."

"Have you seen much of him?" said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Yes, ma'am, a good deal, he was often at Mrs. Evelyn's."

"Is he going to marry one of her daughters?"

"Oh no!" said Fleda, smiling. "He isn't thinking of such a thing; not in America. I don't know what he may do in England."

"No!" said Charlton, "I suppose he would think himself contaminated by matching with any blood in this hemisphere."

"You do him injustice," said Fleda, colouring; "you do not know him, Charlton."

"You do?"—"Much better than that."

"And he is not one of the most touch-me-not pieces of English birth and wealth that ever stood upon their own dignity?"

"Not at all!" said Fleda; "how people may be misunderstood! he is one of the most gentle and kind persons I ever saw."

"To you!"—"To everybody that deserves it."

"How do the Evelyns like this paragon of yours?"

"Oh everybody likes him," said Fleda smiling, "except you and your friend Mr. Thorn."

"Thorn don't like him, eh?"—"I think not."

"What do you suppose is the reason?" said Charlton gravely.

"I don't think Mr. Thorn is particularly apt to like anybody," said Fleda, who knew very well the original cause of both exceptions, but did not like to advert to it.

"Apparently you don't like Mr. Thorn?" remarked Mr. Rossitur. "I don't know who does, sir, much, except his mother."

"What is he?"—"A man not wanting in parts, sir, and with considerable force of character, but I am afraid more for ill than for good. I should be very sorry to trust him with anything dear to me."

"How long were you in forming that opinion?" said Charlton looking at her curiously.—"It was formed, substantially, the first evening I saw him, and I have never seen cause to alter it since."

The several members of the family therewith fell into a general muse, with the single exception of Hugh, whose eyes and thoughts seemed to be occupied with Fleda's living presence. Mr. Rossitur then requested that breakfast might be ready very early—at six o'clock.

"Six o'clock!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossitur.—"I have to take a long ride, on business, which must be done early in the day."

"When will you be back?"—"Not before night-fall."

"But going on *another* business journey!" said Mrs. Rossitur. "You have but just these few hours come home from one."

"Cannot breakfast be ready?"

"Yes, uncle Rolf," said Fleda bringing her bright face before him, "ready at half-past five if you like—now that *I* am to the fore, you know."

He clasped her to his breast and kissed her again; but with a face so very grave that Fleda was glad nobody else saw it.

Then Charlton went, averring that he wanted at least a night and a half sleep between two such journeys as the one of that day and the one before him on the next, especially as he must resign himself to going without anything to eat. Him also Fleda laughingly promised that precisely half an hour before the stage time a cup of coffee and a roll should be smoking on the table, with whatever substantial appendages might be within the bounds of possibility, or the house.

"I will pay you for that beforehand with a kiss," said he.

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Fleda stepping back; "a kiss is a favour taken, not given; and I am entirely ignorant what you have done to deserve it."

"You make a curious difference between me and Hugh," said Charlton half in jest, half in earnest.

"Hugh is my brother, Capt. Rossitur," said Fleda smiling, "and that is an honour you never made any pretensions to."

"Come, you shall not say that any more," said he, taking the kiss that Fleda had no mind to give him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

My flagging soul flies under her own pitch.—*Dryden*

It was not six, and darkness yet filled the world, when Mr. Rossitur came downstairs and softly opened the sitting-room door. But the home-fairy had been at work; he was greeted with such a blaze of cheerfulness as seemed to say what a dark place the world was everywhere but at home; his breakfast-table was standing ready, well set and well supplied; and even

as he entered by one door Fleda pushed open the other and came in from the kitchen, looking as if she had some strange spirit-like kindred with the cheery, hearty glow which filled both rooms.

"Fleda! you up at this hour!"—"Yes, uncle Rolf," she said coming forward to put her hands upon his, "you are not sorry to see me I hope."

But he did not say he was glad; and he did not speak at all; he busied himself gravely with some little matters of preparation for his journey. Evidently the gloom of last night was upon him yet. But Fleda had not wrought for praise, and could work without encouragement; neither step nor hand slackened, till all she and Barby had made ready was in nice order on the table and she was pouring out a cup of smoking coffee.

"You are not fit to be up," said Mr. Rossitur, looking at her, "you are pale now. Put yourself in that armchair, Fleda, and go to sleep, I will do this for myself."

"No, indeed, uncle Rolf," she answered brightly, "I have enjoyed getting breakfast very much at this out-of-the-way hour, and now I am going to have the pleasure of seeing you eat it. Suppose you were to take a cup of coffee instead of my shoulder."

He took it and sat down, but Fleda found that the pleasure of seeing him was to be a very qualified thing. He ate like a business man, in unbroken silence and gravity; and her cheerful words and looks got no return. It became an effort at length to keep either bright. Mr. Rossitur's sole remarks during breakfast were to ask if Charlton was going back that day, and if Philetus was getting the horse ready.

She expected almost that he would go off without speaking to her. But he came up kindly to where she stood watching him.

"You must bid me good-bye for all the family, uncle Rolf, as I am the only one here," she said laughing.

But she was sure that the embrace and kiss which followed were very exclusively for her. They made her face almost as sober as his own.

"There will be a blessing for you," said he, "if there is a blessing anywhere!"—"If, uncle Rolf?" said Fleda, her heart swelling to her eyes.

He turned away without answering her.

Fleda sat down in the easy-chair then and cried. But that lasted very few minutes; she soon left crying for herself to

pray for him, that he might have the blessing he did not know. That did not stop tears.

Weary and tired, tears and longing at length lost themselves in sleep. When she awakened she found the daylight broadly come, little King in her lap, the fire, instead of being burnt out, in perfect preservation, and Barby standing before it and looking at her.

"You ha'n't got one speck o' good by *this* journey to New York," was Miss Elster's vexed salutation.—"Do you think so?" said Fleda, rousing herself. "*I* wouldn't venture to say as much as that, Barby."

"If you have, 'tain't in your cheeks," said Barby, decidedly. "You look just as if you was made of anything that wouldn't stand wear, and that isn't the way you used to look."

"I have been up a good while without breakfast—my cheeks will be a better colour when I have had that, Barby—they feel pale."

The second breakfast was a cheerfuller thing. But when the second traveller was despatched, and the rest fell back upon their old numbers, Fleda was very quiet again. It vexed her to be so, but she could not change her mood. She felt as if she had been whirled along in a dream and was now just opening her eyes to daylight and reality. And reality—she could not help it—looked rather dull after dreamland. She thought it was very well she was waked up; but it cost her some effort to appear so. And when she charged herself with ingratitude, her aunt and Hugh were so exceedingly happy in her company.

Her silence was broken by the appearance of Earl Douglass.

"How d'ye do?" said he. "Got back again. I heerd you was hum, and so I thought I'd just step up and see. Been getting along pretty well?" Fleda answered, smiling internally at the wide distance between her "getting along" and his idea of it.

"Well, the hay's first-rate!" said Earl, taking off his hat and sitting down in the nearest chair; "I've been feeding it out now for a good spell, and I know what to think about it. We've been feeding it out ever since some time this side o' the middle o' November. I never see nothin' sweeter, and I don't want to see nothin' sweeter than it is! and the cattle eats it like May roses. They don't know how to thank you enough for it."

"To thank *you*, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda smiling.

"No," said he in a decided manner, "I don't want no thanks

for it, and I don't deserve none! 'Twa'n't thanks to none of *my* foresightedness that the clover wa'n't served the old way. I didn't like new notions, and I never did like new notions, and I never see much good of 'em; but I suppose there's some on 'em that ain't moonshine—my woman says there is, and after this clover hay I'm willin' to allow that there is! It's as sweet as a posie if you smell to it, and all of it's cured alike; and I think, Fleda, there's a quarter more weight of it."

"Well, that is satisfactory, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda. "How is Mrs. Douglass and Catherine?"

"I ha'n't heard 'em sayin' nothin' about it," he said; "and if there was anythin' the matter I suppose they'd let me know. There don't much go wrong in a man's house without his hearin' tell of it. So I think. Maybe 'tain't the same in other men's houses. That's the way it is in mine."

"Mrs. Douglass would not thank you," said Fleda, wholly unable to keep from laughing. Earl's mouth gave way a very little, and then he went on. "How be you?" he said. "You ha'n't gained much, as I see. I don't see but you're as poor as when you went away."

"I am very well, Mr. Douglass."

"I guess New York ain't the place to grow fat. Well, Fleda, there ha'n't been seen in the hull country, or by any man in it, the like of the crop of corn we took off that 'ere twenty-acre lot. They're all beat to hear tell of it; they won't believe me; Seth Plumfield ha'n't shewed as much himself. He says you're the best farmer in the State."

"I hope he gives you part of the credit, Mr. Douglass. How much was there?"

"I'll take my share of the credit whenever I can get it," said Earl, "and I think it's right to take it, as long as you ha'n't nothing to be ashamed of; but I won't take no more than my share; and I will say I thought we was agoin' to choke the corn to death when we seeded the field in that way. Well, there's better than two thousand bushel—more or less—and as handsome corn as I want to see; there never was handsomer corn. Would you let it go for five shillings? there's a man I've heard of wants the hull of it."

"Is that a good price, Mr. Douglass? Why don't you ask Mr. Rossitur?"

"Do you s'pose Mr. Rossitur knows much about it?" inquired Earl with a curious turn of feature, between sly and contemptuous. "The less he has to do with that heap of corn the bigger it'll be—that's my idee. *I* ain't goin' to ask him

nothin'—you may ask him what you like to ask him—but I don't think he'll tell you much that'll make you and me wiser in the matter o' farmin'."

"But now that he is at home, Mr. Douglass, I certainly cannot decide without speaking to him."

"Very good!" said Earl uneasily; "'tain't no affair of mine; as you like to have it so you'll have it; just as you please! But now, Fleda, there's another thing I want to speak to you about—I want you to let me take hold of that 'ere piece of swamp land and bring it in. I knew a man that fixed a piece of land like that and cleared nigh a thousand dollars off it the first year."

"Which piece?" said Fleda.

"Why you know which 'tis; just the other side of the trees over there—between them two little hills. There's six or seven acres of it—nothin' in the world but mud and briars; will you let me take hold of it? I'll do the hull job if you'll give me half the profits for one year. Come over and look at it, and I'll tell you—come! the walk won't hurt you, and it ain't fur."

All Fleda's inclinations said no, but she thought it was not best to indulge them. She put on her hood and went off with him; and was treated to a long and most implicated detail of ways and means, from which she as length disentangled the rationale of the matter and gave Mr. Douglass the consent he asked for, promising to gain that of her uncle.

The day was fair and mild, and in spite of weariness of body a certain weariness of mind prompted Fleda when she had got rid of Earl Douglass to go and see her aunt Miriam. She went questioning with herself all the way for her want of goodwill to these matters. True, they were not pleasant mind-work; but she tried to school herself into taking them patiently as good life-work. She had had too much pleasant company and enjoyed too much conversation, she said. It had unfitted her for home duties.

Mrs. Plumfield, she knew, was no better. But her eye found no change for the worse. The old lady was very glad to see her, and very cheerful and kind as usual.

"Well, are you glad to be home again?" said aunt Miriam, after a pause in the conversation.

"Everybody asks me that question," said Fleda smiling.

"Perhaps for the same reason I did—because they thought you didn't look very glad."

"I am glad," said Fleda; "but I believe not so glad as I was last year."

"Why not?"

"I suppose I had a pleasanter time. I have got a little spoiled, I believe, aunt Miriam," Fleda said with glistening eyes and an altering voice. "I don't take up my old cares and duties kindly at first; I shall be myself again in a few days."

Aunt Miriam looked at her with that fond, wistful, benevolent look that made Fleda turn away.

"What has spoiled you, love?"—"Oh! easy living and pleasure, I suppose," Fleda said, but said with difficulty.

"Pleasure?" said aunt Miriam, putting one arm gently round her. Fleda struggled with herself.

"It is so pleasant, aunt Miriam, to forget these money affairs! to lift one's eyes from the ground and feel free to stretch out one's hand—not to be obliged to think about spending sixpences, and to have one's mind at liberty for a great many things that I haven't time for here. And Hugh—and Aunt Lucy—somehow things seem sad to me——"

Nothing could be more sympathisingly kind than the way in which aunt Miriam brought Fleda closer to her side and wrapped her in her arms.

"I am very foolish," Fleda whispered,—"I am very wrong; I shall get over it."

"I am afraid, dear Fleda," Mrs. Plumfield said after a pause, "it isn't best for us always to be without sad things, though I cannot bear to see your dear little face look so sad; but it wouldn't fit us for the work we have to do, it wouldn't fit us to stand where I stand now and look forward happily."

"Where you stand?" said Fleda raising her head.

"Yes, and I would not be without a sorrow I have ever known. They are better now, when they are present, but the sweet fruit comes after."

"But what do you mean by 'where you stand?'"

"On the edge of life."

"You do not think so, aunt Miriam!" Fleda said with a terrified look. "You are not worse?"

"I don't expect ever to be better," said Mrs. Plumfield with a smile. "Nay, my love," she said, as Fleda's head went down on her bosom again, "not so! I do not wish it either, Fleda. I do not expect to leave you soon, but I would not prolong the time by a day. I would not have spoken of it now if I had recollected myself, but I am so accustomed to think and

speak of it that it came out before I knew it. My darling child, it is nothing to cry for."

"I know it, aunt Miriam."

"Then don't cry," whispered aunt Miriam, when she had stroked Fleda's head for five minutes.

The mother sighed as her son entered the room.

He looked uncommonly grave, thought Fleda. That did not surprise her, but it seemed that it did his mother, for she asked an explanation. Which, however, he did not give.

"Is your uncle at home?" asked he.

"No," said Fleda, "he went away this morning on business, and we do not expect him home before nightfall. Do you want to see him?"

"No," said Seth very decidedly. "I wish he had staid in Michigan, or gone further west, anywhere that Queechy 'd never have heard of him."

"Why what has he done?" said Fleda, looking up half laughing and half amazed at her cousin. But his face was disagreeably dark, though she could not make out that the expression was one of displeasure. It did not encourage her to talk.

"Do you know a man in New York by the name of Thorn?" he said after standing still a minute or two.

"I know two men of that name," said Fleda, colouring and wondering.

"Is either on 'em a friend of your'n?"—"No."

"He ain't?" said Mr. Plumfield, giving the forestick on the fire an energetic kick which Fleda could not help thinking was mentally aimed at the said New Yorker.

"No, certainly. What makes you ask?"

"Oh," said Seth dryly, "folks' tongues will find work to do; I heard say something like that—I thought you must take to him more than I do."

"Why what do you know of him?"—"He's been here a spell lately," said Seth, "poking round; more for ill than for good, I reckon."

He turned and quitted the room abruptly; and Fleda bethought her that she must go home while she had light enough.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Nothing could be more obliging and respectful than the lion's letter was, in appearance ; but there was death in the true intent.—*L'Estrange.*

THE landscape had grown more dark since Fleda came up the hill, or else the eyes that looked at it. Both probably. It was just after sundown, and that is a very sober time of day in winter, especially in some states of the weather. The sun had left no largesses behind him ; the scenery was deserted to all the coming poverty of night and looked grim and threadbare already. Not one of the colours of prosperity left. The land was in mourning dress ; all the ground and even the ice on the little mill-ponds a uniform spread of white, while the hills were draperied with black stems, here just veiling the snow, and there on a side view making a thick fold of black. Every little unpainted workshop or mill showed uncompromisingly all its forbidding sharpness of angle and outline darkening against the twilight. In better days perhaps some friendly tree had hung over it, shielding part of its faults and redeeming the rest. Now nothing but the gaunt skeleton of a friend stood there, doubtless to bud forth again as fairly as ever should the season smile. Still and quiet all was, as Fleda's spirit, and in too good harmony with it ; she resolved to choose the morning to go out in future. There was as little of the light of spring or summer in her own mind as on the hills, and it was desirable to catch at least a cheering reflection. She could rouse herself to no bright thoughts, try as she would ; the happy voices of nature that used to speak to her were all hushed, or her ear was deaf ; and her eye met nothing that did not immediately fall in with the train of sad images that were passing through her mind and swell the procession.

"Well," said Hugh, who had entered the kitchen with her, "you have been late enough. Did you have a pleasant walk ? You are pale, Fleda ! "

"Yes, it was pleasant," said Fleda with one of her winning smiles, "a kind of pleasant. But have you looked at the hills ? They are exactly as if they had put on mourning—nothing but white and black—a crape-like dressing of black tree-stems upon the snowy face of the ground, and on every slope and edge of the hills the crape lies in folds. Do look at it when you go out ! It has a most curious effect."

"Not pleasant, I should think," said Hugh.

"You'll see it is just as I have described it. No, not pleasant exactly—the landscape wants the sun to light it up just now—it is cold and wilderness-looking. I think I'll take the morning in future. Whither are you bound?"

"I must go over to Queechy Run on business—I'll be home before supper—I should have been back by this time, but Philetus has gone to bed and I had to take care of the cows."

Hugh went out by one door and Fleda by another entered the breakfast-room; the one generally used in winter for all purposes. Mrs. Rossitur sat there alone in an easy chair; and Fleda no sooner caught the outline of her figure than her heart sank at once to an unknown depth—unknown before and unfathomable now. She was *cowering* over the fire, her head sunk in her hands, so crouching, that the line of neck and shoulders instantly conveyed to Fleda the idea of fancied or felt degradation—there was no escaping it—how, whence, what was all wild confusion. But the language of mere attitude was so unmistakable, the expression of crushing pain was so strong, that after Fleda had fearfully made her way up beside her she could do no more. She stood there tongue-tied, spell-bound, present to nothing but a nameless chill of fear and heart-sinking. She was afraid to speak, afraid to touch her aunt, and abode motionless in the grasp of that dread for minutes. But Mrs. Rossitur did not stir a hair, and the terror of that stillness grew to be less endurable than any other.

Fleda spoke to her, it did not win the shadow of a reply, again and again. She laid her hand then upon Mrs. Rossitur's shoulder, but the very significant answer to that was a shrinking gesture of the shoulder and neck away from the hand. Fleda, growing desperate, then implored an answer in words—prayed for an explanation—with an intensity of distress in voice and manner, that no one whose ears were not stopped with a stronger feeling could have been deaf to; but Mrs. Rossitur would not raise her head, nor slacken in the least the clasp of the fingers that supported it, that of themselves in their relentless tension spoke what no words could. Fleda's trembling prayers were in vain, in vain. Poor nature at last sought a woman's relief in tears—but they were heart-breaking, not heart-relieving tears—racking both mind and body more than they ought to bear, but bringing no cure. Mrs. Rossitur seemed as unconscious of her niece's mute agony as she had been of her agony of words; and it was from Fleda's own self-recollection alone that she fought off pain and roused herself above weakness to do what the time called for.

"Aunt Lucy," she said laying her hand upon her shoulder, and this time the voice was steady and the hand would not be shaken off, "Aunt Lucy, Hugh will be in presently—hadn't you better rouse yourself and go upstairs—for awhile? till you are better? and not let him see you so?" How the voice was broken and quivering before it got through!

The answer this time was a low long-drawn moan, so exceeding plaintive and full of pain that it made Fleda shake like an aspen. But after a moment she spoke again, bearing more heavily with her hand to mark her words.

"I am afraid he will be in presently—he ought not to see you now—aunt Lucy, I am afraid it might do him an injury he might not get over."

She spoke with the strength of desperation; her nerves were unstrung by fear, and every joint weakened so that she could hardly support herself. She had not, however, spoken in vain; one or two convulsive shudders passed over her aunt, and then Mrs. Rossitur suddenly rose turning her face from Fleda; neither would she permit her to follow her. But Fleda thought she had seen that one or two unfolded letters or papers of some kind, they looked like letters, were in her lap when she raised her head.

Left alone, Fleda sat down on the floor by the easy chair and rested her head there; waiting, she could do nothing else, till her extreme excitement of body and mind should have quieted itself. She had a kind of vague hope that time would do something for her before Hugh came in. Perhaps it did; for though she lay in a kind of stupor, and was conscious of no change whatever, she was able when she heard him coming to get up and sit in the chair in an ordinary attitude. But she looked like the wraith of herself an hour ago—"Fleda!" Hugh exclaimed as soon as he looked from the fire to her face, "what is the matter? what is the matter with you?"

"I am not very well—I don't feel very well," said Fleda speaking almost mechanically. "I shall have a headache to-morrow."

"Headache! But you look shockingly! what has happened to you? what is the matter, Fleda?"

"I am not ill—I shall be better by and by. There is nothing the matter with me that need trouble you, dear Hugh."

"Nothing the matter with you!" said he, and Fleda might see how she looked in the reflection of his face; "where's mother?"

"She's up-stairs—you mustn't go to her Hugh!" said Fleda

laying a detaining hand upon him with more strength than she thought she had. "I don't want anything."

"Why mustn't I go to her?"

"I don't think she wants to be disturbed."—"I must disturb her."

"You mustn't! I know she don't—she isn't well—something has happened to trouble her."

"What?"—"I don't know."

"And is that what has troubled you too?" said Hugh, his countenance changing as he gained more light on the subject; "what is it, dear Fleda?"

"I don't know," repeated Fleda, bursting into tears. Hugh was quiet enough now, and sat down beside her, subdued and still, without even desiring to ask a question. Fleda's tears flowed violently, for a minute, then she checked them, for his sake; and they sat motionless, without speaking to one another, looking into the fire and letting it die out before them into embers and ashes, neither stirring to put a hand to it. As the fire died the moonlight streamed in; how very dismal the room looked!

"What do you think about having tea?" said Barby opening the door of the kitchen. Neither felt it possible to answer her.

"Mr. Rossitur ain't come home, is he?"—"No," said Fleda shuddering.

"So I thought, and so I told Seth Plumfield just now—he was asking for him—My stars! ha'n't you no fire here? What did you let it go out for?" Barby came in and began to build it up.

"It's growing cold I can tell you, so you may as well have something in the chimney to look at. You'll want it shortly if you don't now."

"Was Mr. Plumfield here, did you say, Barby?"—"Yes."

"Why didn't he come in?"—"I s'pose he hadn't a mind to," said Barby. "'Twa'n't for want of being asked. I did the civil to him if he didn't by me; but he said he didn't want to see anybody but Mr. Rossitur."

Did not want to see anybody but Mr. Rossitur, when he had distinctly said he did not wish to see him! Fleda felt sick, merely from the mysterious dread which could fasten upon nothing and therefore took in everything.

"Well, what about tea?" concluded Barby, when the fire was going according to her wishes. "Will you have it, or will you wait longer?"

"No, we won't wait, we will have it now, Barby," said Fleda,

forcing herself to make the exertion; and she went to the window to put down the hangings.

The moonlight was very bright, and Fleda's eye was caught in the very act of letting down the curtain, by a figure in the road slowing passing before the courtyard fence. It paused a moment by the horse-gate, and turning paced slowly back till it was hid behind the rose-acacias. There was a clump of shrubbery in that corner thick enough even in winter to serve for a screen. Fleda stood with the curtain in her hand, half let down, unable to move, and feeling almost as if the very currents of life within her were standing still too. She thought, she was almost sure, she knew the figure; it was on her tongue to ask Hugh to come and look, but she checked that. The form appeared again from behind the acacias, moving with the same leisurely pace the other way towards the horse-gate. Fleda let down the curtain, then the other two quietly, and then left the room and stole noiselessly out at the front door, leaving it open that the sound of it might not warn Hugh what she was about, and stepping like a cat down the steps ran breathlessly over the snow to the courtyard-gate. There waited, shivering in the cold but not feeling it for the cold within, while the person she was watching stood still a few moments by the horse-gate and came again with leisurely steps towards her.

"Seth Plumfield!" said Fleda, almost as frightened at the sound of her own voice as he was. He stopped immediately, with a start, and came up to the little gate behind which she was standing. But said nothing. "What are you doing here?" —"You oughtn't to be out without anything on," said he, "you're fixing to take your death." He had good reasons to say so. But she gave him no more heed than the wind.

"What are you waiting here for? What do you want?"

"I have nothing better to do with my time," said he; "I thought I'd walk up and down here a little. You go in!"

"Are you waiting to see uncle Rolf?" she said, with teeth chattering.

"You mustn't stay out here," said he earnestly, "you're like nothing but a spook this minute; I'd rather see one, or a hull army of 'em. Go in, go in!"

"Tell me if you want to see him, Seth."—"No, I don't: I told you I didn't."

"Then why are you waiting for him?"

"I thought I'd see if he was coming home to-night, I had a word to say if I could catch him before he got into the house."

"*Is* he coming home to-night?" said Fleda.

"I don't know!" said he looking at her. "Do you?"

Fleda burst open the gate between them, and putting her hands on his implored him to tell her what was the matter. He looked singularly disturbed; his fine eye twinkled with compassion; but his face, never a weak one, showed no signs of yielding now.

"The matter is," said he pressing hard both her hands, "that you are fixing to be down sick in your bed by to-morrow. You mustn't stay another second."

"Come in then."—"No, not to-night."

"You won't tell me!"—"There is nothing I can tell you. Maybe there'll be nothing to tell. Run in, run in, and keep quiet."

Fleda hurried back to the house, feeling that she had gone to the limit of risk already. Not daring to show herself to Hugh in her chilled state of body and mind she went into the kitchen.

"Why what on earth's come over you?" was Barby's terrified ejaculation when she saw her.

"I have been out and got myself cold."

"Cold!" said Barby, "you're looking dreadful! What on earth ails you, Fleda?"

"Don't ask me, Barby," said Fleda hiding her face in her hands and shivering, "I made myself very cold just now—aunt Lucy doesn't feel very well and I got frightened," she added presently.

"What's the matter with her?"—"I don't know, if you'll make me a cup of tea I'll take it up to her, Barby."

"You put yourself down there," said Barby, placing her with gentle force in a chair, "you'll do no such thing till I see you look as if there was some blood in you. I'll take it up myself."

But Fleda held her, though with a hand much too feeble indeed for any but moral suasion. It was enough. Barby stood silently and very anxiously watching her, till the fire had removed the outward chill at least. But even that took long to do, and before it was well done Fleda again asked for the cup of tea. Barby made it without a word, and Fleda went to her aunt with it, taking her strength from the sheer emergency. Her knees trembled under her as she mounted the stairs, and once a glimpse of those words flitted across her mind, "patient continuance in well-doing." It was like a lightning flash in a dark night shewing the way one must go.

She could lay hold of no other stay. Her mind was full of one intense purpose—to end the suspense.

She gently tried the door of her aunt's room; it was unfastened, and she went in. Mrs. Rossitur was lying on the bed; but her first mood had changed, for at Fleda's soft word and touch she half rose up and putting both arms round her waist laid her face against her. There were no tears still, only a succession of low moans, so inexpressibly weak and plaintive that Fleda's nature could hardly bear them without giving way. A more fragile support was never clung to. Yet her trembling fingers, in their agony, moved caressingly among her aunt's hair and over her brow as she begged her—when she could, she was not able at first, to let her know the cause that was grieving her. The straightened clasp of Mrs. Rossitur's arm and her increased moaning gave only an answer of pain. But Fleda repeated the question. Mrs. Rossitur still neglecting it, then made her sit down on the bed, so that she could lay her head higher on Fleda's bosom; where she hid it, with a mingling of fondness given and asked, a poor seeking for comfort and rest, that wrung her niece's heart. They sat so for a little time; Fleda hoping that her aunt would by degrees come to the point herself. The tea stood cooling on the table, not even offered; not wanted there.

"Wouldn't you feel better if you told me, dear aunt Lucy?" said Fleda when they had been for a little while perfectly still. Even the moaning had ceased.

"Is your uncle come home?" whispered Mrs. Rossitur, but so low that Fleda could but half catch the words.—"Not yet."

"What o'clock is it!"—"I don't know, not early, it must be near eight. Why?"

"You have not heard anything of him?"—"No, nothing."

There was silence again for a little, and then Mrs. Rossitur said in a low fearful whisper, "Have you seen anybody round the house?"

Fleda's thoughts flew to Seth, with that nameless fear to which she could give neither shape nor direction, and after a moment's hesitation she said—

"What do you mean?"—"Have you?" said Mrs. Rossitur with more energy.

"Seth Plumfield was here a little while ago."

Her aunt had the clue that she had not, for with a half scream, half exclamation, she quitted Fleda's arms and fell back upon the pillows, turning from her and hiding her face

there. Fleda prayed again for her confidence, as well as the weakness and the strength of fear could do; and Mrs. Rossitur presently grasping a paper that lay on the bed held it out to her, saying only as Fleda was about quitting the room, "Bring me a light."

Fleda left the letter there and went down to fetch one. She commanded herself under the excitement and necessity of the moment, all but her face; that terrified Barby exceedingly. But she spoke with a strange degree of calmness; told her Mrs. Rossitur was not alarmingly ill; that she did not need Barby's services and wished to see nobody but herself and didn't want a fire. As she was passing through the hall again, Hugh came out of the sitting-room to ask after his mother. Fleda kept the light from her face. "She does not want to be disturbed, I hope she will be better to-morrow."

"What is the matter, Fleda?"—"I don't know yet."

"And you are ill yourself, Fleda! you are ill!"—"No, I shall do very well, never mind me. Hugh, take some tea—I will be down by and by."

He went back and Fleda went upstairs. Mrs. Rossitur had not moved. Fleda sat down the light and herself beside it, with the paper her aunt had given her. It was a letter.

"QUEECHY, *Thursday*——

"It gives me great concern, my dear madam, to be the means of bringing to you a piece of painful information—but it cannot be kept long from your knowledge and you may perhaps learn it better from me than by any other channel. May I entreat you not to be too much alarmed, since I am confident the cause will be of short duration.

"Pardon me for what I am about to say.

"There are proceedings entered into against Mr. Rossitur—there are writs out against him—on the charge of having, some years ago, endorsed my father's name upon a note of his own giving. Why it has lain so long I cannot explain. There is unhappily no doubt of the fact.

"I was in Queechy some days ago, on business of my own, when I became aware that this was going on—my father had made no mention of it to me. I immediately took strict measures, I am happy to say I believe with complete success, to have the matter kept a profound secret. I then made my way as fast as possible to New York to confer on the subject with the original mover of it—unfortunately I was disappointed. My father had left for a neighbouring city, to be absent several

days. Finding myself too late to prevent, as I had hoped to do, any open steps from being taken at Queechy, I returned hither immediately to enforce secrecy of proceedings and to assure you, madam, that my utmost exertions shall not be wanting to bring the whole matter to a speedy and satisfactory termination. I entertain no doubt of being able to succeed entirely—even to the point of having the whole transaction remain unknown and unsuspected by the world. It is so entirely as yet, with the exception of one or two law officers whose silence I have means of procuring.

"May I confess that I am not entirely disinterested? May the selfishness of human nature ask its reward, and own its moving spring? May I own that my zeal in this cause is quickened by the unspeakable excellencies of Mr. Rossitur's lovely niece—which I have learned to appreciate with my whole *heart*—and be forgiven? And may I hope for the kind offices and intercession of the lady I have the honour of addressing, with her niece, Miss Ringgan, that my reward, the single word of encouragement I ask for, may be given me? Having that, I will promise anything—I will guarantee the success of any enterprise, however difficult, to which she may impel me and I will undertake that the matter which furnishes the painful theme of this letter shall never more be spoken or thought of by the world, or my father, or by Mrs. Rossitur's obliged, grateful, and faithful servant,

"LEWIS THORN."

Fleda felt as she read as if icicles were gathering about her heart. The whirlwind of fear and distress of a little while ago, which could take no definite direction, seemed to have died away and given place to a dead frost—the steady bearing down of disgrace and misery, inevitable, unmitigable, unchangeable; no lessening, no softening of that blasting power, no, nor even any rising up from under it; the landscape could never be made to smile again. It was the fall of a bright star from their home constellation; but alas! the star was fallen long ago, and the failure of light which they had deplored was all too easily accounted for; yet now they knew that no restoration was to be hoped. And the mother and son—what would become of them? And the father—what would become of him? what further distress was in store? *Public* disgrace? and Fleda bowed her head forward on her clasped hands with the mechanical vain endeavour to seek rest or shelter from thought. She made nothing of Mr. Thorn's professions; she took only the facts of his letter; the rest her

eye had glanced over as if she had no concern with it, and it hardly occurred to her that she had any. But the sense of his words she had taken in, and knew, better perhaps than her aunt, that there was nothing to look for from his kind offices. The weight on her heart was too great just then for her to suspect as she did afterwards that he was the sole mover of the whole affair.

And if an arrest should take place there that night! Fleda shuddered, and unable to go on thinking rose up and went to her aunt's bedside. It had not entered her mind till the moment she read Mr. Thorn's letter that Seth Plumfield was sheriff for the county. She was shaking again from head to foot with fear. She could not say anything—the touch of her lips to the throbbing temples, soft and tender as sympathy itself, was all she ventured.

"Have you heard anything of him?" Mrs. Rossitur whispered.

"No, I doubt if we do at all to-night."

There was a half-breathed "oh!" of indescribable pain and longing; and with a restless change of position Mrs. Rossitur gathered herself up on the bed and sat with her head leaning on her knees. Fleda brought a large cloak and put it round her.

"I am in no danger," she said, "I wish I were!"

Again Fleda's lips softly, tremblingly, touched her cheek. Mrs. Rossitur put her arm round her and drew her down to her side upon the bed; and wrapped half of the big cloak about her; and they sat there still in each other's arms, without speaking or weeping, while quarter after quarter of an hour passed away—nobody knew how many. And the cold bright moonlight streamed in on the floor, mocking them.

"Oh!" whispered Mrs. Rossitur at last, "go downstairs and take care of yourself—and Hugh."

"Won't you come?" Mrs. Rossitur shook her head.

"Mayn't I bring something? do let me!"

But Mrs. Rossitur's shake of the head was decisive. Fleda crawled off the bed, feeling as if a month's illness had been making its ravages upon her frame and strength.

She first went into the kitchen to tell Barby to fasten the doors and not sit up. "I don't believe uncle Rolf will be home to-night; but if he comes I will let him in."

Barby looked at her with absolutely a face of distress; but not daring to ask and not knowing how to propose anything, she looked in silence.

"It must be nine o'clock now," Fleda went on.

"And how long be you going to sit up?" said Barby.

"I don't know—a while yet."

"You look proper for it!" said Barby half sorrowfully and half indignantly; "you look as if a straw would knock you down this minute. Go yourself off to bed, Fleda," she added with a mixture of reproach and kindness, "and leave me alone to take care of myself and the house too."

Fleda did not remonstrate, for Barby was as determined in her way as it was possible for anything to be. She went into the other room without a particle of notion what she should say or do. Hugh was walking up and down the floor—a most unusual sign of perturbation with him. He met and stopped her as she came in. "Fleda, I cannot bear it. What is the matter? Do you know?" he said as her eyes fell.—"Yes."

"What is it?"—She was silent and tried to pass on to the fire. But he stayed her.

"What is it?" he repeated.—"Oh, I wish I could keep it from you!" said Fleda bursting into tears.

She then, after much persuasion told him the contents of the letter which Mrs. Rossitur had received.

Hugh sat down and leaned his head on the table. A long, long, time passed, unmeasured by the wild coursing of thought to and fro. Then Fleda came and knelt down at the table beside him, and put her arms round his neck.

"Dear Hugh," she said, and if ever love and tenderness and sympathy could be distilled in tones, such drops were those that fell upon the mind's ears, "can't you look up at me?"

He did then, but he did not give her a chance to look at him. He locked his arms about her, bringing her close to his breast; and for a few minutes, in utter silence, they knew what strange sweetness pure affection can mingle even in the communion of sorrow. There were tears shed in those minutes that, bitter as they seemed at the time, memory knew had been largely qualified with another admixture.

"Dear Hugh," said Fleda, "let us keep what we can: won't you go to bed and rest?"

He looked dreadfully as if he needed it. But the usual calmness and sweetness of his face was not altered; it was only deepened to very great sadness. Mentally, Fleda thought, he had borne the shock better than his mother; for the bodily frame she trembled. He had not answered and she spoke again.

"You need it worse than I, poor Fleda."

"I will go too, presently, I do not think anybody will be here to-night."

"Is—are there—is this what has taken him away?" said Hugh.

Her silence and her look told him, and then laying her cheek again alongside of his she whispered, how unsteadily—"We have only one help, dear Hugh."

They were still and quiet again for minutes, counting the pulses of pain; till Fleda came back to her poor wish "to keep what they could." She mixed a restorative of wine and water, which however little desired, she felt was necessary to both of them, and Hugh went upstairs. She stayed a few minutes to prepare another glass with particular care for her aunt. It was just finished, and taking her candle she had bid Barby good-night, when there came a loud rap at the front door. Fleda set down candle and glass, from the quick inability to hold them as well as for other reasons; and she and Barby stood and looked at each other, in such a confusion of doubt and dread that some little time had passed before either stirred even her eyes. Barby then threw down the tongs with which she had begun to make preparations for covering up the fire and set off to the front.

"You mustn't open the door, Barby," cried Fleda following her. "Come in here and let us look out of one of the windows."

Before this could be reached however, there was another prolonged repetition of the first thundering burst. It went through Fleda's heart, because of the two upstairs who must hear it.

Barby threw up the sash. "Who's there?"

"Is this Mr. Rossitur's place?" enquired a gruff voice.—"Yes it is."

"Well will you come round and open the door?"

"Who wants it open?"—"A lady wants it open."

"A lady!—what lady?"—"Down yonder in the carriage."

"What lady? who is she?"—"I don't know who she is, she wanted to come to Mr. Rossitur's place, will you open the door for her?"

Barby and Fleda both now saw a carriage standing in the road. "We must see who it is first," whispered Fleda.

"When the lady comes I'll open the door," was Barby's ultimatum.

The man withdrew to the carriage; and after a few moments of intense watching Fleda and Barby certainly saw something in female apparel enter the little gate of the court-yard and come up over the bright moonlit snow towards the house, accompanied by a child; while the man with whom they had had the interview came behind transformed into an unmistakable baggage-carrier.

CHAPTER XL.

Zeal was the spring whence flowed her hardiment.—*Fairfax.*

BARBY undid bolt and lock and Fleda met the traveller in the hall. She was a lady; her air and dress showed that, though the latter was very plain.

"Does Mr. Rossitur live here?" was her first word.

Fleda answered it, and brought her visitor into the sitting-room. But the light falling upon a form and face that had seen more wear and tear than time, gave her no clue as to the who or what of the person before her. The stranger's hurried look round the room seemed to expect something.

"Are they all gone to bed?"—"All but me," said Fleda.

"We have been delayed—we took a wrong road—we've been riding for two hours to find the place—hadn't the right direction." Then looking keenly at Fleda, from whose vision an electric spark of intelligence had scattered clouds, she said —"I am Marion Rossitur."

"I knew it!" said Fleda, with lips and eyes that gave her already a sister's welcome; and they were folded in each other's arms almost as tenderly and affectionately, on the part of one, at least, as if there had really been the relationship between them. But more than surprise and affection struck Fleda's heart.

"And where are they all, Fleda? Can't I see them?"—"You must wait till I have prepared them; Hugh and Aunt Lucy are not very well. I don't know that it will do for you to see them at all to-night, Marion."

"Not to-night! They are not ill?"—"No, only enough to be taken care of, not ill. But it would be better to wait."

"And my father?"—"He is not at home."

Marion exclaimed in sorrow, and Fleda to hide the look that she felt was on her face stooped down to kiss the child. He was a remarkably fine-looking manly boy.

"That is your cousin Fleda," said his mother.

"No, *aunt* Fleda," said the person thus introduced, "don't put me off into cousindom, Marion. I am uncle Hugh's sister, and so I am your aunt Fleda. Who are you?"—"Rolf Rossitur Schwiden."

Alas, how wide are the ramifications of evil! How was what might have been very pure pleasure utterly poisoned and turned into bitterness. It went through Fleda's heart with a keen pang when she heard that name and looked on the very

fair brow that owned it, and thought of the ineffaceable stain that had come upon them both. She dared look at nobody but the child. He already understood the melting eyes that were making acquaintance with his, and half felt the pain that gave so much tenderness to her kiss, and looked at her with a grave face of awakening wonder and sympathy. Fleda was glad to have business to call her into the kitchen.

"Who is it?" was Barby's immediate question.—"Aunt Lucy's daughter."

"She don't look much like her!" said Barby intelligently.—"They will want something to eat, Barby."

"I'll put the kettle on. It'll boil directly. I'll go in there and fix up the fire."

A word or two more, and then Fleda ran up to speak to her aunt and Hugh. Her aunt she found in a state of agitation that was frightful. Fleda's own nerves were in no condition to stand another shock when she left her and went to Hugh's door. But she could get no answer from him though she spoke repeatedly. She did not return to her aunt's room. She went downstairs and brought up Barby and a light from thence. Hugh was lying senseless and white; not whiter than his adopted sister as she stood by his side. Her eye went to her companion.

"Not a bit of it!" said Barby; "he's in nothing but a faint, just run downstairs and get the vinegar bottle, Fleda, the pepper vinegar. Is there any water here?"

Fleda obeyed; and watched, she could little more, the efforts of Barby, who indeed needed no help, with the cold water, the vinegar, and the rubbing of the limbs. They were for sometime unsuccessful; the fit was a severe one; and Fleda was exceedingly terrified before any signs of returning life came to reassure her.

"Now you go downstairs and keep quiet!" said Barby, when Hugh was thoroughly restored, and had smiled a faint answer to Fleda's kiss and explanations. "Go, Fleda! you ain't fit to stand. Go and sit down some place, and I'll be along directly and see how the fire burns. Don't you s'pose Mis' Rossitur could come in and sit in this easy chair a spell without hurting herself?"

It occurred to Fleda immediately that it might do more good than harm to her aunt if her attention were diverted even by another cause of anxiety. She gently summoned her, telling her no more than was necessary to fit her for being Hugh's nurse; and in a very few minutes she and Barby were at

liberty to attend to other claims upon them. But it sank into her heart, "Hugh will not get over this!" and when she entered the sitting-room, what Mr. Carleton years before had said of the wood-flower was come true in its fullest extent, "a storm-wind had beaten it to the ground." She was able literally to do no more than Barby had said, sit down and keep herself quiet.

"Are you going to be ill too, Fleda?" said Marion suddenly. "You are looking very far from well!"—"I shall have a headache to-morrow," said Fleda quietly. "I generally know the day beforehand."

"Does it always make you look so?"—"Not always—I am somewhat tired."

"Where is my father gone?"—"I don't know—Where is your husband?"

"I have lost him—years ago," said Marion with a quick expressive glance towards the child. "I never lost what I at first thought I had, for I never had it. Do you understand?" Fleda's eyes gave a sufficient answer.

"I am a widow—these five years—in all but what the law would require," Marion went on. "I have been alone since then—except my child. He was two years old then; and since then I have lived such a life, Fleda!"

"Why didn't you come home?"—"Couldn't: the most absolute reason in the world. Think of it! Come home! It was as much as I could do to stay there!" Those sympathising eyes were enough to make her go on. "I have wanted everything—except trouble. I have done everything—except ask alms. I have learned, Fleda, that death is not the worst form in which distress can come." Fleda felt stung, and bent down her head to touch her lips to the brow of little Rolf.

"Death would have been a trifle!" said Marion. "I mean, not that *I* should have wished to leave Rolf alone in the world; but if I had been left—I mean I would rather wear outside than inside mourning." Fleda looked up again, and at her.

"Oh, I was so mistaken, Fleda!" she said clasping her hands, "so mistaken! in everything; so disappointed, in all my hopes. As the loss of my fortune was the cause of it all."

Nay, verily! thought Fleda; but she said nothing; she hung her head again; and Marion after a pause went on to question her about an endless string of matters concerning themselves and other people, past doings and present prospects, till little Rolf, soothed by the uninteresting soft murmur of voices, fell into a sound sleep, his head resting upon Fleda.

"Here is one comfort for you, Marion," she said looking down at the dark eyelashes which lay on a cheek rosy and healthy as ever seven years old knew! "he is a beautiful child, and I am sure a fine one."

"It is thanks to his beauty that I have ever seen home again," said his mother. Fleda had no heart this evening to speak words that were not necessary; her eyes asked Marion to explain herself.

"He was in Hyde-park one day—I had a miserable lodging not far from it, and I used to let him go in there, because he must go somewhere, you know, I couldn't go with him."—"Why not."

"Couldn't? Oh Fleda! I have seen changes! He was there one afternoon alone, and had got into difficulty with some bigger boys—a little fellow, you know, he stood his ground manfully but his strength wasn't equal to his spirits, and they were tyrannizing over him after the fashion of boys, who are I do think the ugliest creatures in creation!" said Mme. Schwiden, not apparently reckoning her own to be of the same gender, "and a gentleman who was riding by stopped and interfered and took him out of their hands, and then asked him his name, struck I suppose with his appearance. Very kind, wasn't it? men so seldom bother themselves about what becomes of children. I suppose there were thousands of others riding by at the same time."

"Very kind," Fleda said.

"When he heard what his name was he gave his horse to his servant and walked home with Rolf; and the next day he sent me a note, speaking of having known my father and mother and asking permission to call upon me. I never was so mortified, I think, in my life," said Marion after a moment's hesitation.

"Why?" said Fleda, not a little at a loss to follow out the chain of her cousin's reasoning.

"Why I was in such a sort of place—you don't know, Fleda; I was working then for a fancy storekeeper, to support myself, living in a miserable little two rooms. If it had been a stranger I wouldn't have cared so much, but somebody that had known us in different times. I hadn't a thing in the world to answer the note upon but a half sheet of letter paper."

Fleda's lips sought Rolf's forehead again, with a curious rush of tears and smiles at once. Perhaps Marion had caught the expression of her countenance, for she added, with a little energy—

"It is nothing to be surprised at—you would have felt just the same; for I knew by his note, the whole style of it, what sort of a person it must be."

"My pride has been a good deal chastened," Fleda said gently.

"I never want *mine* to be, beyond minding everything," said Marion; "and I don't believe yours is. I don't know why in the world I did not refuse to see him; I had fifty minds to, but he had won Rolf's heart, and I was a little curious, and it was something strange to see the face of a friend, any better one than my old landlady, so I let him come."

"Was *she* a friend?" said Fleda.

"If she hadn't been I should not have lived to be here—the best soul that ever was. But still, you know, she could do nothing for me but be as kind as she could live; this was something different. So I let him come, and he came the next day." Fleda was silent, a little wondering that Marion should be so frank with her, beyond what she had ever been in former years. But, as she guessed, Mme. Schwiden's heart was a little opened by the joy of finding herself at home, and the absolute necessity of talking to somebody; and there was a further reason, which Fleda could not judge of, in her own face and manner. Marion needed no questions, and went on again after stopping a moment.

"I was so glad in five minutes,—I can't tell you, Fleda,—that I had let him come. I forgot entirely about how I looked and the wretched place I was in. He was all that I had supposed, and a great deal more, but somehow he hadn't been in the room three minutes before I didn't care at all for all the things I had thought would trouble me. Isn't it strange what a witchery some people have to make you forget everything but themselves!"

"The reason is, I think, because that is the only thing they forget," said Fleda, whose imagination however was entirely busy with the *singular* number.

"I shall never forget him," said Marion. "He was very kind to me—I cannot tell how kind—though I never realised it till afterwards; at the time it always seemed only a sort of elegant politeness which he could not help. I never saw so elegant a person. He came two or three times to see me, and he took Rolf out with him I don't know how often to drive; and he sent me fruit—such fruit!—and game, and flowers; and I had not had anything of the kind, not even seen it, for so long—I can't tell you what it was to me. He said

he had known my father and mother well when they were abroad."

"What was his name?" said Fleda quickly.

"I don't know, he never told me, and I never could ask him. Don't you know there are some people you can't do anything with but just what they please? There wasn't the least thing like stiffness—you never saw anybody less stiff, but I never dreamed of asking him questions except when he was out of sight. Why, do you know him?" she said suddenly.

"When you tell me who he was I'll tell you," said Fleda smiling.

"Have you ever heard this story before?"—"Certainly not!"

"He is somebody that knows us very well," said Marion, "for he asked after everyone of the family in particular."—"But what had all this to do with your getting home?"

"I don't wonder you ask. The day after his last visit came a note saying that he owed a debt in my family which it had never been in his power to repay; that he could not give the enclosure to my father, who would not recognise the obligation; and that if I would permit him to place it in my hands I should confer a singular favour upon him."

"And what was the enclosure?"—"Five hundred pounds."

Fleda's head went down again and tears dropped fast upon little Rolf's shoulder.

"I suppose my pride has been a little broken, too," Marion went on, "or I shouldn't have kept it. But then if you saw the person, and the whole manner of it—I don't know how I could have sent it back. Literally I couldn't though, for I hadn't the least clue. I never saw or heard from him afterwards."

"When was this, Marion?"—"Last spring."

"Last spring! then what kept you so long?"

"Because of the arrival of eyes that I was afraid of. I dared not make the least move that would show I could move. I came off the very first packet after I was free."

"How glad you must be!" said Fleda.—"Glad!"

"Glad of what, mamma?" said Rolf, whose dreams the entrance of Barby had probably disturbed.—"Glad of bread and butter," said his mother; "wake up—here it is."

The young gentleman declared, rubbing his eyes, that he did not want it now; but, however, Fleda contrived to dispel that illusion, and bread and butter was found to have the same dulcifying properties at Queechy that it owns in all the rest

of the world. Little Rolf was completely mollified after a hearty meal and was put with his mother to enjoy most unbroken slumbers in Fleda's room. Fleda herself, after a look at Hugh, crept to her aunt's bed; whither Barby very soon despatched Mrs. Rossitur, taking in her place the arm-chair and the watch with most invincible good-will and determination; and sleep at last took the joys and sorrows of that disturbed household into its kind custody.

Fleda was the first one awake, and was thinking how she should break the last news to her aunt, when Mrs. Rossitur put her arms round her, and after a most affectionate look and kiss, spoke to what she supposed had been her niece's purpose.

"You want taking care of more than I do, poor Fleda!"

"It was not for that I came," said Fleda; "I had to give up my room to travellers."—"Travellers!"

A very few words more brought out the whole, and Mrs. Rossitur sprang out of bed and rushed to her daughter's room. Fleda hid her face in the bed to cry—for a moment's passionate indulgence in weeping while no one could see. But a moment was all. There was work to do and she must not disable herself.

It was all done, and done well, though with what secret flagging of mind and body nobody knew or suspected. The business of the day was arranged, and then Fleda sat herself down in the breakfast-room to wear out the rest of the day in patient suffering. Pain of body rising above pain of mind had obliged as far as possible, even thought to be still; when a loud rap at the front door brought the blood in a sudden flush of pain to Fleda's face. She knew instinctively what it meant. She heard Barby's distinct accents saying that somebody was "not well." The other voice was more smothered. But in a moment the door of the breakfast-room opened and Mr. Thorn walked in.

"Miss Ringgan!" said the gentleman, coming up softly as to something that frightened him, "my dear Miss Fleda!—I am distressed! You are very ill—can nothing be done to relieve you?"

Fleda's lips rather than her voice said—"Nothing."

"I would not have come in on any account to disturb you it I had known—I did not understand you were more than a trifle ill."—Fleda wished he would mend his mistake, as his understanding certainly by this time was mended. But that did not seem to be his conclusion of the best thing to do. —"Since I am here, can you bear to hear me say three words? without too much pain? I do not ask you to speak——"

A faint whispered "yes" gave him leave to go on. She had never looked at him. She sat like a statue; to answer by a motion of her head was more than could be risked.

He drew up a chair and sat down.—"I am not surprised," he said gently, "to find you suffering. I knew how your sensibilities must feel the shock of yesterday—I would fain have spared it you—I will spare you all further pain on the same score if possible. Dear Miss Ringgan, since I am here and time is precious, may I say one word before I cease troubling you—I take it for granted that you were made acquainted with the contents of my letter to Mrs. Rossitur—with *all* the contents—were you?"—Again Fleda's lips almost voicelessly gave the answer.

"Will you give me what I venture to ask for?" said he gently, "the permission to work *for you?* Do not trouble those precious lips to speak—the answer of these fingers will be as sure a warrant to me as all words that could be spoken that you do not deny my request."

He had taken one of her hands in his own. But the fingers lay with unanswering coldness and lifelessness for a second in his clasp and then were drawn away and took determinate hold of the chair-back. Again the flush came to Fleda's cheeks brought by a sharp pain—oh, bodily and mental too!—and after a moment's pause, with a distinctness of utterance that let him know every word, she said, "A generous man would not ask it, sir."

Thorn sprang up, and several times paced the length of the room, up and down, before he said anything more. He looked at Fleda, but the flush was gone again, and nothing could seem less conscious of his presence. Pain and patience was in every line of her face, but he could read nothing more, except a calmness as unmistakably written. Thorn gave that face repeated glances as he walked, then stood still and read it at leisure. Then he came to her side again and spoke in a different voice.

"You are so unlike anybody else," he said, "that you shall make me unlike myself. I will do freely what I hoped to do with the light of your smile before me. You shall hear no more of this affair, neither you nor the world—I have the matter perfectly in my own hands—it shall never rise a whisper again. I will move heaven and earth rather than fail—but there is no danger of my failing. I will try to prove myself worthy of your esteem even where a man is most excusable for being selfish."

He took one of her cold hands again,—Fleda could not help it without more force than she cared to use, and indeed pain would by this time almost have swallowed up other sensation if every word and touch had not sent it in a stronger throb to her very finger-ends. Thorn bent his lips to her hand, twice kissed it fervently, and then left her.

Barby coming in a little after found her quite unable to speak and scarce able to breathe, from agony. Barby's energies and fainting remedies were again put into use; but pain reigned triumphant for hours, and when its hard rule was at last abated Fleda was able to do nothing but sleep like a child for hours more.

Towards a late tea-time she was at last awake, and carrying on a very onesided conversation with Rolf, her own lips being called upon for little more than a smile now and then.

"Fleda," said Barby putting her head in, "I wish you'd just step out here and tell me which cheese you'd like to have cut."

"What a fool," said Marion. "Let her cut them all if she likes."

"She is no fool!" said Fleda. She thought Barby's punctiliousness however a little ill-timed, as she rose from her sofa and went into the kitchen.

"Well you *do* look as if you wa'n't good for nothing but to be taken care of!" said Barby. "I wouldn't have riz you up if it hadn't been just tea-time, and I knowed you couldn't stay quiet much longer;" and with a look which explained her tactics she put into Fleda's hand a letter directed to her aunt.

"Philetus give it to me," she said, without a glance at Fleda's face, "he said it was give to him by a spry little shaver who wa'n't a' mind to tell nothin' about himself."

"Thank you, Barby!" was Fleda's most grateful return; and summoning her aunt upstairs she took her into her own room and locked the door before she gave her the letter which Barby's shrewdness and delicacy had taken such care should not reach its owner in a wrong way. Fleda watched her as her eye ran over the paper and caught it as it fell from her fingers.

"My dear Wife,—That villain Thorn has got a handle of me which he will not fail to use, you know it all I suppose by this time. It is true that in an evil hour, long ago, when greatly pressed, I did what I thought I should surely undo in a few days. The time never came. I don't know why he

has let it lie so long, but he has taken it up now and he will push it to the extreme. There is but one thing left for me. I shall not see you again. The rascal would never let me rest, I know, in any spot that calls itself American ground. You will do better without me than with me. R.R."

Fleda mused over the letter for several minutes, and then touched her aunt, who had fallen on a chair with her head sunk in her hands.

"What does he mean?" said Mrs. Rossitur, looking up with a perfectly colourless face.—"To leave the country."

"Are you sure? is that it?" said Mrs. Rossitur rising and looking over the words again; "he would do anything, Fleda——"

"That is what he means, aunt Lucy; don't you see he says he could not be safe anywhere in America."

Mrs. Rossitur stood eyeing with intense eagerness for a minute or two the note in her niece's hand. "Then he is gone! now that it is all settled! And we don't know where—and we can't get word to him."

Her cheek which had a little brightened became perfectly white again.

"He isn't gone yet, he can't be; he cannot have left Queechy till to-day; he will be in New York for several days yet probably."

"New York! it may be Boston?"—"No, he would be more likely to go to New York; I am sure he would; he is accustomed to it."

"We might write to both places," said poor Mrs. Rossitur. "I will do it and send them off at once."—"But he might not get the letters," said Fleda thoughtfully, "he might not dare to ask at the post-office."

His wife looked at that possibility, and then wrung her hands. "Oh why didn't he give us a clue!"

Fleda put an arm round her affectionately, and stood thinking; stood trembling might as well be said, for she was too weak to be standing at all.

"What can we do, dear Fleda!" said Mrs. Rossitur in great distress. "Once out of New York and we can get nothing to him! If he only knew that there is no need, and that it is all over!"

"We must do everything, aunt Lucy," said Fleda thoughtfully, "and I hope we shall succeed yet. We will write, but I think the most hopeful other thing we could do would be

to put advertisements in the newspapers; he would be very likely to see them."

"Advertisements! But you couldn't; what would you put in?" "Something that would catch his eye and nobody's else—*that* is easy, aunt Lucy."

"But there is nobody to put them in, Fleda; you said uncle Orrin was going to Boston."—"He wasn't going there till next week, but he was to be in Philadelphia a few days before that; the letter might miss him."

"Mr. Plumfield! Couldn't he?"—But Fleda shook her head.

"Wouldn't do, aunt Lucy; he would do all he could, but he don't know New York nor the papers, he wouldn't know how to manage it, he don't know uncle Rolf; I shouldn't like to trust it to him."

"Who then? there isn't a creature we could ask."

Fleda laid her cheek to her poor aunt's, and said, "I'll do it."

"But you must be in New York to do it, dear Fleda, you can't do it here."—"I will go to New York."

"When?"—"To-morrow morning."

"But dear Fleda, you can't go alone? I can't let you, and you're not fit to go at all, my poor child!" and between conflicting feelings Mrs. Rossitur sat down and wept without measure.

"Listen, aunt Lucy," said Fleda pressing her hand on her shoulder, "listen, and don't cry so! I'll go and make all right, if efforts can do it. I am not going alone, I'll get Seth to go with me; and I can sleep in the cars and rest nicely in the steamboat—I shall feel happy and well when I know that I am leaving you easier and doing all that can be done to bring uncle Rolf home. Leave me to manage, and don't say anything to Marion, it is one blessed thing that she need not know anything about all this. I shall feel better than if I were at home and had trusted this business to any other hands."—"*You* are the blessing of my life," said Mrs. Rossitur.

"Cheer up, and come down and let us have some tea," said Fleda kissing her; "I feel as if that would make me up a little; and then I'll write the letters. I shan't want but very little baggage; there'll be nothing to pack up." Philetus was sent up the hill with a note to Seth Plumfield, and brought home a favourable answer.

CHAPTER XLI.

I thank you for your company; but good faith, I had as lief have been myself alone.—*As You Like It.*

The first thing next morning Seth Plumfield came down to say that he had seen Dr. Quackenboss the night before and had chanced to find out that he was going to New York too, this very day; and knowing that the doctor would be just as safe an escort as himself, Seth had made over the charge of his cousin to him; "calculating," he said, "that it would make no difference to Fleda and that he had better stay at home with his mother." Fleda said nothing and looked as little as possible of her disappointment, and her cousin went away wholly unsuspecting of it.

Coffee was swallowed, her little travelling bag and bonnet on the sofa; all ready. Then came the doctor.

"My dear Miss Ringgan! I am most happy of this delightful opportunity—I had supposed you were located at home for the winter. This is a sudden start."

"Is it sudden to you, Dr. Quackenboss?" said Fleda.

"Why—a—not disagreeably so," said the doctor smiling; "nothing could be that in the present circumstances—but I—a—hadn't calculated upon it for much of a spell beforehand." Fleda was vexed, and looked—only unconversable.

"I suppose," said the doctor after a pause, "that we have not much time to waste—a—in idle moments. Which route do you intend to travel?"—"I was thinking to go by the North River, sir."

"But the ice has collected—I am afraid."—"At Albany, I know; but when I came up there was a boat every other day, and we could get there in time by the stage—this is her day."

"But we have had some pretty tight weather since, if you remember," said the doctor; "and the boats have ceased to connect with the stage. We shall have to go to Greenfield to take the Housatonic, which will land us at Bridgeport on the Sound."

"Have we time to reach Greenfield this morning?"—"Oceans of time!" said the doctor delightedly; "I've got my team here and they're jumping out of their skins with having nothing to do and the weather—they'll carry us there as spry as grasshoppers—now, if you're ready, my dear Miss Ringgan!"

There was nothing more but to give and receive those

speechless lip-messages that are out of the reach of words, and Mrs. Rossitur's half-spoken last charge, to take care of *herself;* and with these seals upon her mission Fleda set forth and joined the doctor; thankful for one foil to curiosity in the shape of a veil and only wishing that there were any invented screen that she could place between her and hearing.

"I hope your attire is of a very warm description," said the doctor as he helped her into the waggon; "it friz pretty hard last night, and I don't think it has got out of the notion yet. If I had been consulted in any other—a—form, than that of a friend, I should have disapprobated, if you'll excuse me, Miss Ringgan's travelling again before her 'Rose of Cassius' there was in blow. I hope you have heard no evil tidings? Dr.—a—Gregory, I hope, is not taken ill?"—"I hope not, sir," said Fleda.

"He didn't look like it. A very hearty old gentleman. Not very old either, I should judge. Was he the brother of your mother or your father?"

"Neither, sir."

"Ah!—I misunderstood—I thought, but of course I was mistaken,—I thought I heard you speak to him under the title of uncle. But that is a title we sometimes give to elderly people, as a term of familiarity."

Fleda was ready to laugh, cry, and be angry, in a breath. She looked straight before her and was mum.

"Where is Mr. Rossitur now?"—Fleda replied, with a jump of her heart, that business affairs had obliged him to be away for a few days.

"And when does he expect to return?" said the doctor.—"I hope he will be home as soon as I am," said Fleda.

"Then you do not expect to remain long in the city this time?"—"I shall not have much of a winter at home if I do," said Fleda. "We are almost at January."

"Because," said the doctor, "in that case I should have no higher gratification than in attending upon your motions. I—a—beg you to believe, my dear Miss Ringgan, that it would afford me the—a—most particular—it would be most particularly grateful to me to wait upon you to—a—to the confines of the world."

Fleda hastened to assure her officious friend that the time of her return was altogether uncertain; resolving rather to abide a guest with Mrs. Pritchard than to have Dr. Quackenboss hanging upon her motions every day of her being there. She was extremely glad to reach the cars and take refuge in

seeming sleep from the mongrel attentions, which if for the most part prompted by admiration, owned so large a share of curiosity. Her weary head and heart would fain have courted the reality of sleep, as a refuge from more painful thoughts and a feeling of exhaustion that could scarcely support itself; but the restless roar and jumble of the rail-cars put it beyond her power. How long the hours were—how hard to wear out, with no possibility of a change of position that would give rest; Fleda would not even raise her head when they stopped for fear of being talked to; how trying that endless noise to her racked nerves. It came to an end at last, though Fleda would not move for fear they might be only taking in wood and water.

"Miss Ringgan!" said the doctor in her ear,—"my dear Miss Ringgan! !—we are here!"—"Are we?" said Fleda looking up; "what other name has the place, doctor?"

"Why, Bridgeport," said the doctor, "we're at Bridgeport—now we have leave to exchange conveyances. A man feels constrained after a prolonged length of time in a place. How have you enjoyed the ride?"—"Not very well, it has seemed long. I am glad we are at the end of it!"

But as she rose and threw back her veil the doctor looked startled.

"My dear Miss Ringgan!—are you faint?"—"No, sir."

"You are not well, indeed!—I am very sorry—the ride has been—take my arm! Ma'am," said the doctor touching a black satin cloak which filled the passage-way, "will you have the goodness to give this lady a passport?" But the black satin cloak preferred a straightforward manner of doing this, so their egress was somewhat delayed. Happily faintness was not the matter.

"My dear Miss Ringgan!" said the doctor, as they reached the ground and the outer air, "what was it?—the stove too powerful? You are looking—you are of a dreadfully delicate appearance!"

"I had a headache yesterday," said Fleda; "it always leaves me with a disagreeable reminder the next day. I am not ill."

But he looked frightened, and hurried her as fast as he dared to the steamboat, and there proposed half-a-dozen restoratives; the simplest of which Fleda took, and then sought delicious rest from him and from herself on the cushions of a settee. Delicious! though she was alone, in the cabin of a steamboat, with strange forms and noisy tongues around her,

the closed eyelids shut it all out ; and she had time but for one resting thought of " patient continuance in well-doing," and one happy heart-look up to Him who has said that He cares for His children, a look that laid her anxieties down there, when past misery and future difficulty faded away before a sleep that lasted till the vessel reached her moorings and was made fast.

She was too weary and faint even to think during the long drive up to Bleecker-street. She was fain to let it all go—the work she had to do and the way she must set about it, and rest in the assurance that nothing could be done that night. She did not so much as hear Dr. Quackenboss's observations, though she answered a few of them, till at the door, she was conscious of his promising to see her to-morrow, and of her instant conclusion to take measures to see nobody.

How strange everything seemed. She walked through the familiar hall, feeling as if her acquaintance with every old thing was broken. There was no light in the back parlour, but a comfortable fire.

" Is my—is Dr. Gregory at home ? " she asked of the girl who had let her in.—" No ma'am ; he hasn't got back from Philadelphia."

" Tell Mrs. Pritchard a lady wants to see her." Good Mrs. Pritchard was much more frightened than Dr. Quackenboss had been when she came into the back parlour to see " a lady " and found Fleda in the great arm-chair taking off her things. She poured out questions, wonderings and lamentings, not " in a breath " but in a great many ; quite forgot to be glad to see her, she looked so dreadfully ; and " what *had* been the matter ? " Fleda answered her, told of yesterday's illness and to-day's journey ; and met all her shocked enquiries with so composed a face and such a calm smile and bearing, that Mrs. Pritchard was almost persuaded not to believe her eyes.

" My uncle is not at home ? "—" Oh no, Miss Fleda ! I suppose he's in Philadelphy—but his motions is so little to be depended on that I never know when I have him ; maybe he'll stop going through to Boston, and maybe no, and I don't know when ; so anyhow I had to have a fire made and this room already ; and ain't it lucky it was ready for you to-night ; and now he ain't here you can have the great chair all to yourself and make yourself comfortable—we can keep warmer here, I guess, than you can in the country," said the good housekeeper giving some skilful admonishing touches

to the fire; "and you must just sit there and read and rest, and see if you can't get back your old looks again. If I thought it was *that* you came for I'd be happy. I never *did* see such a change in anyone in five days!" She stood looking down at her guest with a face of very serious concern, evidently thinking much more than she choose to give utterance to. "I am tired, Mrs. Pritchard," said Fleda, smiling up at her.

"I wish you had somebody to take care of you, Miss Fleda, that wouldn't let you tire yourself. It's a sin to throw your strength away so—and you don't care for looks nor nothing else when it's for other people. You're looking just as handsome, too, for all," she said, her mouth giving way a little, as she stooped down to take off Fleda's overshoes, "but that's only because you can't help it. Now what is there you'd like to have for supper? just say and you shall have it—whatever would seem best—because I mightn't hit the right thing?"

Fleda declared her indifference to everything but a cup of tea, and her hostess bustled away to get that and tax her own ingenuity and kindness for the rest. And leaning her weary head back in the lounge, Fleda tried to think. But it was not time yet; she could only feel—feel what a sad change had come over her since she had sat there last; shut her eyes and wish she could sleep again.

But Mrs. Pritchard's hospitality must be gone through with first. The nicest of suppers was served in the bright little parlour and her hostess was a compound of care and good-will; nothing was wanting to the feast but a merry heart. Fleda could not bring that, so her performance was unsatisfactory and Mrs. Pritchard was distressed. Fleda went to her own room promising better doings to-morrow.

She awoke in the morning to the full burden of care and sorrow which sheer weakness and weariness the day before had in part laid down, to a quicker sense of the state of things than she had had yet.

She was early downstairs, but the room was warm and in order, and the servant had left it. Fleda sought out paper and pencil and sat down to fashion the form of an advertisement—the first thing to be done. She had no notion how difficult a thing till she came to do it.

The miserable needlessness of the whole thing, the pitiful weighing of sorrow against sorrow, and shame against shame, overcame her for a little; and then dashing away the tears she had no time for and locking up the strong box of her heart, she took her pencil again.

"Queechy"

"Let me see you at the old place. I have come here on urgent business for you. Do not deny me for H—'s sake."

With a trifle of alteration she thought this would do; and went on to make a number of fair copies of it for so many papers. This was done and all traces of it out of the way before Mrs. Pritchard came in and the breakfast; and after bracing herself with coffee, though the good housekeeper was still sadly dissatisfied with her indifference to some more substantial brace in the shape of chickens and ham, Fleda prepared herself inwardly and outwardly to brave the wind and the newspaper offices, and set forth. Making her slow way through the choked narrow streets, where the mere confusion of business was bewildering,—very to anyone come from Queechy; among crowds of what mixed and doubtful character, hurrying along and brushing with little ceremony past her; edging by loitering groups that filled the whole sidewalks, or perhaps edging through them, groups whose general type of character was sufficient plain and *un*mixed; entering into parley with clerk after clerk who looked at such a visitor as an anomaly,—poor Fleda almost thought so too, and shrank within herself; venturing hardly her eyes beyond her thick veil, and shutting her ears resolutely, as far as possible to all the dissonant rough voices that helped to assure her that she was where she ought not to be. Sometimes she felt that it was *impossible* to go on and finish her task; but a thought or two nerved her again to plunge into another untried quarter, or make good her entrance to some new office through a host of loungers and waiting news-boys collected round the door. Sometimes, in utter discouragement, she went on and walked to a distance and came back, in the hope of a better opportunity. It was a long business; and she often had to wait. The end of her list was reached at last, and the paper was thrown away; but she did not draw free breath till she had got to the west side of Broadway again, and turned her back upon them all.

It was late then, and it was a weary long way up to Bleecker street, as she was forced to travel it. The relief was unspeakable to find herself within her uncle's door, with the sense that her dreaded duty was done, and well and thoroughly. Now her part was to be still and wait. But with the relief came also a reaction from the strain of the morning. Before her weary feet had well mounted the stairs, her heart gave up its control and she locked herself in her room to yield

to a helpless outpouring of tears which she was utterly unable to restrain, though conscious that long time could not pass before she would be called to dinner. Dinner had to wait.

"Miss Fleda," said the housekeeper, in a vexed tone, when the meal was half over, "I didn't know you ever did anything wrong."

"You were sadly mistaken, Mrs. Pritchard," said Fleda, half lightly, half sadly.

"You're looking not a bit better than last night, and if anything rather worse," Mrs. Pritchard went on. "It isn't right, Miss Fleda. You oughtn't to ha' set the first step out of doors, I know you oughtn't, this blessed day; and you've been on your feet these seven hours, and you shew it! You're just ready to drop."—"I will rest to-morrow," said Fleda, "or try to."

"You are fit for nothing but bed," said the housekeeper, "and you've been using yourself, Miss Fleda, as if you had the strength of an elephant. Now do you think you've been doing right?"

Fleda would have made some cheerful answer, but she was not equal to it; she had lost all command of herself, and she dropped knife and fork to burst into a flood of exceeding tears. Mrs. Pritchard equally astonished and mystified, hurried questions, apologies, and consolations one upon another; and made up her mind that there was something mysterious on foot about which she had better ask no questions. Neither did she, from that time. She sealed up her mouth, and contented herself with taking the best care of her guest that she possibly could. Needed enough, but all of little avail.

The reaction did not cease with that day. The next, Sunday, was spent on the sofa, in a state of utter prostration. With the necessity for exertion the power had died. Fleda could only lie upon the cushions and sleep helplessly, while Mrs. Pritchard sat by, anxiously watching her; curiosity really swallowed up in kind feeling. Monday was little better, but towards the after part of the day the stimulant of anxiety began to work again, and Fleda sat up to watch for a word from her uncle. But none came, and Tuesday morning distressed Mrs. Pritchard with its want of amendment. It was not to be hoped for, Fleda knew, while this fearful watching lasted. Her uncle might not have seen the advertisement, he might not have got her letter, he might be even then setting sail to quit home for ever, and she could do nothing but wait. Her nerves were alive to every stir; every touch

of the bell made her tremble ; it was impossible to read, to lie down, to be quiet or still anywhere. She had set the glass of expectancy for one thing in the distance ; and all things else were a blur or a blank.

They had sat down to dinner that Tuesday, when a ring at the door which had made her heart jump was followed—yes, it was by the entrance of the maid-servant holding a folded bit of paper in her hand. Fleda did not wait to ask whose it was ; she seized it and saw ; and sprang away upstairs. It was a sealed scrap of paper, that had been the back of a letter, containing two lines without signature. "I will meet you *at Dinah's* if you come there alone about sundown."

Enough ! Dinah was an old black woman who once had been a very attached servant in Mr. Rossitur's family, and having married and become a widow years ago, had set up for herself in the trade of a washerwoman, occupying an obscure little tenement out towards Chelsea.

CHAPTER XLII.

How well appaid she was her bird to find.—*Sidney.*

FLEDA counted the minutes till it wanted an hour of sundown ; and then, avoiding Mrs. Pritchard, made her escape out of the house. A long walk was before her and the latter part of it through a region which she wished to pass while the light was good. And she was utterly unable to travel at any but a very gentle rate. So she gave herself plenty of time.

It was a very bright afternoon and all the world was astir. Fleda shielded herself with a thick veil and went up one of the narrow streets, not daring to venture into Broadway ; and passing Waverly-place, which was almost as bright, turned down Eight-street. A few blocks now and she would be out of all danger of meeting anyone that knew her. She drew her veil close and hurried on. But the proverb saith "a miss is as good as a mile," and with reason ; for if fate wills the chances make nothing. As Fleda set her foot down to cross Fifth-

avenue she saw Mr. Carleton on the other side coming up from Waverly-place. She went as slowly as she dared, hoping that he would pass without looking her way, or be unable to recognise her through her thick wrapper. In vain, she soon saw that she was known ; he was waiting for her, and she must put up her veil and speak to him.

"Why I thought you had left New York," said he ; "I was told so."

"I had left it—I have left it, sir," said Fleda ; "I have only come back for a day or two——"

"Have you been ill ? " he said with a sudden change of tone, the light in his eye and smile giving place to a very marked gravity.

Fleda would have answered with a half smile, but such a sickness of heart came over her that speech failed and she was very near bursting into tears. Mr. Carleton looked at her earnestly a moment, and then put the hand which Fleda had forgotten he still held upon his arm and began to walk forward gently with her. Something in the grave tenderness with which this was done reminded Fleda irresistibly of the times when she had been a child under his care.

She checked her tears and raised her head ; she ventured no more ; she dared not turn her face towards her companion. He looked at her once or twice, as if in doubt whether to speak or not. "Are you not going beyond your strength ? " he said at length gently.

Fleda said no, although in a tone that half confessed his suspicion. He was silent again, however, and she cast about in vain for something to speak of ; it seemed to her that all subjects of conversation in general had been packed up for exportation, neither eye nor memory could light upon a single one. Block after block was passed, the pace at which he walked, and the manner of his care for her alone, shewing that he knew what a very light hand was resting upon his arm.

In silence they were nearing Sloman-street and she could not take him there with her. She did not know what to say, nor what he would think ; and she said not another word till they came to the corner. There she must stop and speak.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Carleton," she said, drawing her hand from his arm, "for taking care of me all this disagreeable way ; I will not give you any more trouble."

"You are not going to dismiss me ? " said he, looking at her with a countenance of serious anxiety. "I must," said Fleda ingenuously, "I have business to attend to here——"

"But you will let me have the pleasure of waiting for you?" —"Oh, no," said Fleda, hesitating and flushing, "thank you, Mr. Carleton, but pray do not, I don't know at all how long I may be detained."

He bowed, she thought gravely, and turned away, and she entered the little wretched street, with a strange feeling of pain that she could not analyse. She did not know where it came from, but she thought if there only had been a hiding-place for her she could have sat down and wept a whole heart-full. The feeling must be kept back now, and it was soon forgotten in the throbbing of her heart at another thought which took entire possession.

The sun was not down, there was time enough, but it was with a step and eye of hurried anxiety that Fleda passed along the little street, for fear of missing her quest, or lest Dinah should have changed her domicile. Yet would her uncle have named it for their meeting if he had not been sure of it? It was very odd he should have appointed that place at all, and Fleda was inclined to think he must have seen Dinah by some chance, or it never would have come into his head. Still her eyes passed unheeding over all the varieties of dinginess and misery in her way, intent only upon finding that particular dingy cellar-way which used to admit her to Dinah's premises. It was found at last and she went in.

The old woman, herself most unchanged, did not know the young lady, but well remembered the little girl whom Fleda brought to her mind. And then she was over-joyed to see her, and asked a multitude of questions, and told a long story of her having met Mr. Rossitur in the street the other day, "in the last place where she'd have looked to see him;" and how old he had grown, and how surprised she had been to see the grey hairs in his head. Fleda at last gave her to understand that she expected him to meet her there and would like to see him alone; and the good woman immediately took her work into another apartment, made up the fire and set up the chairs and leaving her, assured Fleda she would lock up the doors "and not let no one come through."

It was sundown, and later Fleda thought, and she felt as if every pulse was doing double duty. No matter if she were shattered and the work done. But what work!—Oh the needlessness, the cruelty, the folly of it! And how much of the ill consequences she might be unable after all to ward off. She took off her hat to relieve a nervous smothered feeling, and walked, and sat down, and then sat still, from trembling

inability to do anything else. Dinah's poor little room, clean though it was, looked to her the most dismal place in the world from its association with her errand; she hid her face on her knees that she might have no disagreeableness to contend with but that which could not be shut out.

It had lain there some time, till a sudden feeling of terror at the growing lateness made her raise it to look at the window. Mr. Rossitur was standing still before her, he must have come in very softly,—and looking,—oh, Fleda had not imagined him looking so changed. All was forgotten; the wrong, and the needlessness, and the indignation with which she had sometimes thought of it; Fleda remembered nothing but love and pity, and threw herself upon his neck with such tears of tenderness and sympathy, such kisses of forgiveness and comfort-speaking, as might have broken a stouter heart than Mr. Rossitur's. He held her in his arms for a few minutes, passively suffering her caresses, and then gently unloosing her hold placed her on a seat, sat down a little way off, covered his face and groaned aloud.

Fleda could not recover herself at once. Then shaking off her agitation she came and knelt down by his side, and putting one arm over his shoulders laid her cheek against his forehead. Words were beyond reach, but his forehead was wet with her tears; and kisses, of soft entreaty, of winning assurance, said all she could say.

"What did you come here for, Fleda?" said Mr. Rossitur at length, without changing his position—"To bring you home, uncle Rolf."

"Home?" said he, with an accent between happiness and despair.—"Yes, for it's all over, it's all forgotten, there is no more to be said about it all," said Fleda, getting her words out she didn't know how.

"What is forgotten?" said he harshly.—"All that you would wish, sir," replied Fleda softly and gently; "there is no more to be done about it; and I came to tell you if possible before it was too late. Oh, I'm so glad!" and her arms and her cheek pressed closer as fresh tears stopped her voice.

"How do you know, Fleda?" said Mr. Rossitur, raising his head and bringing hers to his shoulder, while his arms in turn enclosed her. Fleda whispered—"He told me so himself."

"Who?"—"Mr. Thorn."

The words were but just spoken above her breath. Mr. Rossitur was silent for some time.

"Are you sure you understood him?"

"Yes sir; it could not have been spoken plainer."

"Are you quite sure he meant what he said, Fleda?"

"Perfectly sure, uncle Rolf! I know he did."

"What stipulation did he make beforehand?"

"He did it without any stipulation, sir."

"What was his inducement then? If I know him he is not a man to act without any." Fleda's cheek was dyed, but except that she gave no other answer.

"Why has it been left so long?" said her uncle presently.—"I don't know, sir—he said nothing about that. He promised that neither we nor the world should hear anything more of it."

"The world?" said Mr. Rossitur.—"No sir, he said that only one or two persons had any notion of it and that their secrecy he had the means of securing."

"Did he tell you anything more?"—"Only that he had the matter entirely under his control, and that never a whisper of it should be heard again. No promise could be given more fully and absolutely."

Mr. Rossitur drew a long breath, speaking to Fleda's ear very great relief and was silent.

"And what reward is he to have for this, Fleda?" he said, after some musing.—"All that my hearty thanks and gratitude can give, as far as I am concerned, sir."

"Is that what he expects, Fleda?"—"I cannot help what he expects," said Fleda in some distress.

"What have you engaged yourself to, my child?"—"Nothing in the world, uncle Rolf!" said Fleda earnestly, "nothing in the world. I haven't engaged myself to anything. The promise was made freely, without any sort of stipulation."

Mr. Rossitur looked thoughtful and disquieted. Fleda's tears were pouring again.

"I will not trust him," he said. "I will not stay in the country!"

"But you will come home, uncle?" said Fleda terrified.

"Yes my dear child—yes my dear child!" he said tenderly, putting his arms round Fleda again and kissing her, with an earnestness of acknowledgment that went to her heart, her lips and brow, "you shall do what you will with me; and when I go, we will all go together."

From Queechy! From America! But she had no time for that thought now.

"You said 'for Hugh's sake,'" Mr. Rossitur observed after

a pause, and with some apparent difficulty; "what of him?" —"He is not well, uncle Rolf," said Fleda, "and I think the best medicine will be the sight of you again."

Mr. Rossitur looked pale and was silent a moment.

"And my wife?" he said.—His face, and the thought of those faces at home, were too much for Fleda; she could not help it; "Oh, uncle Rolf," she said, hiding her face, "they want to see you only again now!"

Mr. Rossitur leaned his head in his hands and groaned; and Fleda could but cry; she felt there was nothing to say.

"It was for Marion," he said at length, "it was when I was hard pressed and I was fearful if it were known that it might ruin her prospects. I wanted that miserable sum—only four thousand dollars—that fellow Schwiden asked to borrow it of me for a few days, and to refuse would have been to confess all. I dared not try my credit, and I just madly took that step that proved irretrievable—I counted at the moment upon funds that were coming to me only the next week, sure, I thought, as possible, but the man cheated me, and our embarrassments thickened from that time; that thing has been a weight—oh a weight of deadening power! round my neck ever since. I have died a living death these six years!"

"I know it, dear uncle—I know it all!" said Fleda, bringing the sympathising touch of her cheek to his again.

"The good that it did has been unspeakably overbalanced by the evil—even long ago I knew that."

"The good that it did!" It was no time *then* to moralize, but he must know that Marion was at home, or he might incautiously reveal to her what happily there was no necessity for her ever knowing. And the story must give him great and fresh pain. "Dear uncle Rolf!" said Fleda pressing closer to him, "we may be happier than we have been in a long time, if you will only take it so. The cloud upon you has been a cloud upon us."

"I know it?" he exclaimed, "a cloud that served to show me that my jewels were diamonds!"

"You have an accession to your jewels, uncle Rolf."

"What do you mean?"—"I mean," said Fleda trembling, "that there are two more at home."

He held her back to look at her.

"Can't you guess who?" "No!" said he. "What do you mean?"

"I must tell you, because they know nothing, and needn't know, of all this matter."

"What are you talking about?"—"Marion is there."

"Marion!" exclaimed Mr. Rossitur, with quick changes of expression. "Marion! At Queechy! and her husband?"—"No sir, a dear little child."

"Marion! and her husband, where is he?"

Fleda hesitated.—"I don't know, I don't know whether she knows."

"Is he dead?"—"No sir."

Mr. Rossitur put her away and got up and walked, or strode, up and down the little apartment. Fleda dared not look at him, even by the faint glimmer that came from the chimney.

But abroad it was perfectly dark—the stars were shining, the only lamps that illumined the poor little street, and for a long time there had been no light in the room but that of the tiny wood fire. Fleda came at last to her uncle's side, and putting her arm within his said, "How soon will you set off for home, uncle Rolf?"—"To-morrow morning."

"You must take the boat to Bridgeport now—you know the river is fast."—"Yes I know——."

"Then I will meet you at the Wharf, uncle Rolf, at what o'clock?"

"My dear child," stopping and passing his hand tenderly over her cheek, "are you fit for it to-morrow! You had better stay where you are quietly for a few days, you want rest."

"No, I will go home with you," said Fleda, "and rest there. But hadn't we better let Dinah in and bid her goodbye? for I ought to be somewhere else to get ready."

Dinah was called, and a few kind words spoken, and with a more substantial remembrance, or reward from Fleda's hand they left her.

Fleda had the support of her uncle's arm till they came within sight of the house, and then he stood and watched her while she went the rest of the way alone.

CHAPTER XLIII.

As some lone bird at day's departing hour
Sings in the sunbeam of the transient shower,
Forgetful though its wings are wet the while.—*Bowles*

HAPPILY possessed with the notion that there was some hidden mystery in Fleda's movements, Mrs. Pritchard said not a word about her having gone out, and only spoke in looks her pain at the imprudence of which she had been guilty. But when Fleda asked to have a carriage ordered to take her to the boat in the morning, the good housekeeper could not hold any longer.

"Miss Fleda," said she with a look of very serious remonstrance, "I don't know what you're thinking of, but I know you're fixing to kill yourself. You want to be in bed for two days running now this minute."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Pritchard," said Fleda smiling; "you are very careful of me; but I must go home to-morrow, and go to bed afterwards."

The housekeeper looked at her a minute in silence, and then said, "Don't, dear Miss Fleda!" with an energy of entreaty which brought the tears into Fleda's eyes. But she persisted in desiring the carriage; and Mrs. Pritchard was silenced, observing however that she shouldn't wonder if she wasn't able to go after all. Fleda herself was not without a doubt on the subject before the evening was over. The reaction, complete now, began to make itself felt; and morning settled the question. She was not able even to rise from her bed.

The housekeeper was, in a sort, delighted; and Fleda was in too passive a mood of body and mind to have any care on the subject. The agitation of the past days had given way to an absolute quiet that seemed as if nothing could ever ruffle it again, and this feeling was seconded by the extreme prostration of the body. She was a mere child in the hands of her nurse, and had, Mrs. Pritchard said, "if she wouldn't mind her telling, the sweetest baby-face that ever had so much sense belonging to it."

The morning was half spent in dozing slumbers, when Fleda heard a rush of footsteps, much lighter and sprightlier than good Mrs. Pritchard's, coming up the stairs and pattering along the entry to her room; and with little ceremony

in rushed Florence and Constance Evelyn. They almost smothered Fleda with their delighted caresses, and ran so hard their questions about her looks and her illness, that she was well nigh spared the trouble of answering.

"You horrid little creature!" said Constance, "why didn't you come straight to our house? Just think of the injurious suspicions you have exposed us to! to say nothing of the extent of fiction we have found ourselves obliged to execute. I didn't expect it of you, little Queechy."

Fleda kept her pale face quiet on the pillow, and only smiled her incredulous curiosity.

"But when did you come back, Fleda?" said Miss Evelyn.

"We should never have known a breath about your being here," Constance went on. "We were sitting last night in peaceful unconsciousness of there being any neglected calls upon our friendship in the vicinity, when Mr. Carleton came in and asked for you. Imagine our horror! we said you had gone out early in the afternoon and had not returned."

"You didn't say that!" said Fleda colouring.

"And he remarked at some length," said Constance, "upon the importance of young ladies having some attendance when they are out late in the evening, and that you in particular were one of those persons—he didn't say, but he intimated, of a slightly volatile disposition, whom their friends ought not to lose sight of."

"But what brought you to town again, Fleda?" said the elder sister.

"What makes you talk so, Constance?" said Fleda.

"I haven't told you the half!" said Constance demurely. "And then mamma excused herself as well as she could, and Mr. Carleton said very seriously that he knew there was a great element of headstrongness in your character."

"Constance, be quiet!" said her sister. "*Will* you tell me, Fleda, what you have come to town for? I am dying with curiosity."

"Then it's inordinate curiosity, and ought to be checked, my dear," said Fleda smiling.

"Tell me!"—"I came to take care of some business that could not very well be attended to at a distance."

"Who did you come with?"—"One of our Queechy neighbours that I heard was coming to New York."

"Wasn't your uncle at home?"—"Of course not. If he had been, there would have been no need of my stirring."

"But was there nobody else to do it but you?"—"Uncle

Orrin away, you know; and Charlton down at his post—Fort Hamilton, is it?—I forget which fort—he is fast there."

"He is not so very fast," said Constance, "for I see him every now and then in Broadway shouldering Mr. Thorn instead of a musket; and he has taken up the distressing idea that it is part of his duty to oversee the progress of Florence's worsted work (I've made over that horrid thing to her, Fleda), or else his precision has been struck with the anomaly of blue stars on a white ground, and he is studying that,—I don't know which,—and so every few nights he rushes over from Governor's Island, or somewhere, to prosecute enquiries. Mamma is quite concerned about him—she says he is wearing himself out."

The mixture of amusement, admiration, and affection, with which the other sister looked at her and laughed with her was a pretty thing to see.

"But where is your other cousin—Hugh?" said Florence.—"He was not well."

"Where is your uncle?"—"He will be at home to-day I expect; and so should I have been—I meant to be there as soon as he was,—but I found this morning that I was not well enough, to my sorrow."

"You were not going alone!"—"Oh no—a friend of ours was going to-day."

"I never saw anybody with so many friends!" said Florence. "But are you coming to us now, Fleda? How soon are you going to get up?"—"Oh, by to-morrow," said Fleda smiling; "but I had better stay where I am the little while I shall be here—I must go home the first minute I can find an opportunity."

"But you shan't find an opportunity till we've had you," said Constance. "I'm going to bring a carriage for you this afternoon. I could bear the loss of your friendship, my dear, but not at the peril of my own reputation. Mr. Carleton is under the impression that you are suffering from a momentary succession of fainting fits, and if we were to leave you here in an empty house to come out of them at your leisure, what would he think of us?"

What would he think! Oh world! Is this it?

But Fleda was not able to be moved in the afternoon! and it soon appeared that nature would take more revenge than a day's sleep for the rough handling she had had the past week. Fleda could not rise from her bed the next morning; and instead of that a kind of nondescript nervous fever set in:

nowise dangerous, but very wearying. She was nevertheless extremely glad of it, for it would serve to explain to all her friends the change of look which had astonished them. They would make it now the token of coming, not of past, evil. The rest she took with her accustomed patience and quietness, thankful for everything after the anxiety and the relief she had just before known.

Dr. Gregory came home from Philadelphia in the height of her attack, and aggravated it for a day or two with the fear of his questioning. But Fleda was surprised at his want of curiosity. He asked her indeed what she had come to town for, but her whispered answer of "Business," seemed to satisfy him, for he did not enquire what the business was. He did ask her furthermore what had made her get sick; but this time he was satisfied more easily still, with a very curious sweet smile which was the utmost reply Fleda's wits at the moment could frame. "Well, get well," said he, kissing her heartily once or twice, "and I won't quarrel with you about it."

The getting well however promised to be a leisurely affair. Dr. Gregory stayed two or three days and then went on to Boston, leaving Fleda in no want of him.

Mrs. Pritchard was the tenderest and carefullest of nurses. The Evelyns did everything *but* nurse her. They sat by her, talked to her, made her laugh, and not seldom made her look sober too, with their wild tales of the world and the world's doings. But they were indeed very affectionate and kind, and Fleda loved them for it.

She was quieting herself one morning, as well as she could, in the midst of both, lying with shut eyes against her pillow, and trying to fix her mind on pleasant things, when she heard Mrs. Pritchard open the door and come in. She knew it was Mrs. Pritchard so she didn't move nor look. But in a moment the knowledge that Mrs. Pritchard's feet had stopped just by the bed, and a strange sensation of something delicious saluting her, made her open her eyes; when they lighted upon a huge bunch of violets, just before them, and in most friendly neighbourhood of her nose. Fleda started up, and her "Oh!" fairly made the housekeeper laugh; it was the very quintessence of gratification.

"Where did you get them?" "I didn't get them indeed, Miss Fleda," said the housekeeper gravely, with an immense amount of delighted satisfaction.

"Delicious? Where did they come from?"—"Well they

must have come from a greenhouse, or hothouse, or something of that kind, Miss Fleda,—these things don't grow nowhere out o' doors at this time."

Mrs. Pritchard has guessed Fleda had got the clue, from her quick change of colour and falling eye. There was a quick little smile too; and "How kind!" was upon the end of Fleda's tongue, but it never got any further. Her energies, so far as expression was concerned, seemed to be concentrated in the act of smelling. Mrs. Pritchard stood by.

"They must be put in water," said Fleda. "I must have a dish for them. Dear Mrs. Pritchard, will you get me one?"

The housekeeper went, smiling to herself. The dish was brought, the violets placed in it, and a little table at Fleda's request was set by the side of the bed, close to her pillow, for them to stand upon. And Fleda lay on her pillow and looked at them.

Mrs. Pritchard thought Fleda lived upon the violets that day rather than upon food and medicine; or at least she said they agreed remarkably well together. And the next day it was much the same.

"What will you do when they are withered?" she said that evening. "I shall have to see and get some more for you."

"Oh they will last a great while," said Fleda smiling.

On the next morning Mrs. Pritchard came into her room with a great bunch of roses, the very like of the one Fleda had had at the Evelyns'. She delivered them with a sort of silent triumph, and then as before stood by to enjoy Fleda and the flowers together. But the degree of Fleda's wonderment, pleasure, and gratitude, made her reception of them, outwardly at least, this time rather grave.

"You may throw the others away now, Miss Fleda," said the housekeeper smiling—"Indeed I shall not."

"The violets, I suppose, is all gone," Mrs. Pritchard went on; "but I never *did* see such a bunch of roses as that since I lived anywhere. They have made a rose of you, Miss Fleda."

"How beautiful!" was Fleda's answer.

"Somebody, he didn't say who, desired to know particularly how Miss Ringgan was to-day."

"Somebody is *very* kind!" said Fleda from the bottom of her heart. "But dear Mrs. Pritchard, I shall want another dish."

Somebody was kind, she thought more and more; for there came every day or two the most delicious bouquets, every day

different. They were *at least* equal in their soothing and refreshing influences to all the efforts of all the Evelyns and Mrs. Pritchard put together. There never came any name with them, and there never was any need. Those bunches of flowers certainly had a physiognomy; and to Fleda were (not the flowers, but the choosing, cutting, and putting of them together) the embodiment of an amount of grace, refined feeling, generosity, and kindness that her imagination never thought of in connection with but one person. And his kindness was answered, perhaps Mrs. Pritchard better than Fleda guessed how well, from the delighted colour and sparkle of the eye with which every fresh arrival was greeted as it walked into her room. By Fleda's order the bouquets were invariably put out of sight before the Evelyns made their first visit in the morning, and not brought out again till all danger of seeing them any more for the day was passed. The regular coming of these floral messengers confirmed Mrs. Pritchard in her mysterious surmises about Fleda, which were still further strengthened by this incomprehensible order; and at last she got so into the spirit of the thing that if she heard an untimely ring at the door she would catch up a glass of flowers and run as if they had been contraband, without a word from anybody.

The Evelyns wrote to Mrs. Rossitur, by Fleda's desire, so as not to alarm her; merely saying that Fleda was not quite well, and that they meant to keep her a little while to recruit herself; and that Mrs. Rossitur must send her some clothes. This last clause was the particular addition of Constance.

The fever lasted a fortnight, and then went off by degrees, leaving her with a very small portion of her ordinary strength. Fleda was to go to the Evelyns as soon as she could bear it; at present she was only able to come down to the little back parlour and sit in the doctor's arm-chair, and eat jelly, and sleep, and look at Constance, and when Constance was not there look at her flowers.

She was disagreeably surprised one day, after she had been two or three days downstairs, by a visit from Mrs. Thorn. In her well-grounded dread of seeing one person Fleda had given strict orders that no *gentlemen* should be admitted; she had not counted upon this invasion. Mrs. Thorn had always been extremely kind to her, but though Fleda gave her credit for thorough good-heartedness, and a true liking for herself, she could not disconnect her attentions from another thought, and therefore always wished them away; and never had her kind face been more thoroughly disagreeable to Fleda than

when it made its appearance in the doctor's little back parlour on this occasion. With even more than her usual fondness, or Fleda's excited imagination fancied so, Mrs. Thorn lavished caresses upon her, and finally besought her to go out and take the air in her carriage. Fleda tried most earnestly to get rid of this invitation, and was gently unpersuadable, till the lady at last was brought to promise that she should see no creature during the drive but herself. An ominous promise; but Fleda did not know any longer how to refuse without hurting a person for whom she had really a grateful regard. So she went. And doubted afterwards exceedingly whether she had done well.

She took special good care to see nobody again till she went to the Evelyns. But then precautions were at an end. It was no longer possible to keep herself shut up. She had cause, poor child, the very first night of her coming, to wish herself back again.

This first evening she would vain have pleaded weakness as her excuse and gone to her room, but Constance laid violent hands on her and insisted that she should stay at least a little while with them. And she seemed fated to see all her friends in a bevy. First came Charlton; then followed the Decaturs whom she knew and liked very well, and engrossed her, happily, before her cousin had time to make any enquiries; then came Mr. Carleton; then Mr. Stackpole. Then Mr. Thorn, in expectation of whom Fleda's breath had been coming and going painfully all the evening. She could not meet him without a strange mixture of embarrassment and confusion with the gratitude she wished to express, an embarrassment not at all lessened by the air of happy confidence with which he came forward to her. It carried an intimation that almost took away the little strength she had. And if anything could have made his presence more intolerable, it was the feeling she could not get rid of that it was the cause why Mr. Carleton did not come near her again; though she prolonged her stay in the drawing-room in the hope that he would. It proved to be all for Mr. Thorn's benefit alone.

"Well you stayed all the evening after all," said Constance as they were going upstairs.—"Yes, I wish I hadn't," said Fleda. "I wonder when I shall be likely to find a chance of getting back to Queechy."

"You're not fit yet, so you needn't trouble yourself about it," said Constance. "We'll find you plenty of chances."

Fleda could not think of Mr. Thorn without trembling. His manner meant—so much more than it had any right,

or than she had counted upon. He seemed—she pressed her hands upon her face to get rid of the impression—he seemed to take for granted precisely that which she had refused to admit; he seemed to reckon as paid for that which she had declined to set a price upon. Her uncle's words and manner came up in her memory. She could see nothing best to do but to get home as fast as possible. She had no one here to fall back on.

For several days she denied herself absolutely to morning visitors of every kind. But she could not entirely absent herself from the drawing-room in the evening; and whenever the family were at home there was a regular levee. Mr. Thorn could not be avoided then. He was always there, and always with that same look and manner of satisfied confidence. Fleda was as grave, as silent, as reserved, as she could possibly be and not be rude; but he seemed to take it in excellent good part, as being half indisposition and half timidity. Fleda set her face earnestly towards home, and pressed Mrs. Evelyn to find her an opportunity, weak or strong, of going there; but for those days as yet none presented itself.

Mr. Carleton was at the house almost as often as Mr. Thorn, seldom staying so long however, and never having any more to do with Fleda than he had that first evening. Whenever he did come in contact with her, he was, she thought, as grave as he was graceful. That was to be sure his common manner in company, yet she could not help thinking there was some difference since the walk they had taken together, and it grieved her.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"The best-laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft agley."—*Burns.*

AFTER a few days Charlton verified what Constance had said about his not being very *fast* at Fort Hamilton, by coming again to see them one morning. Fleda asked him if he could not get another furlough to go with her home, but he declared

he was just spending one which was near out; and he could not hope for a third in some time; he must be back at his post by the day after to-morrow.

"When do you want to go, coz?"—"I would to-morrow if I had anybody to go with me," said Fleda sighing.

"No you wouldn't," said Constance, "you are well enough to go out now, and you forget we are all to make Mrs. Thorn happy to-morrow night."—"I am not," said Fleda.

"Not! you can't help yourself; you must; you said you would."—"I did not indeed."

"Well then, I said it for you, and that will do just as well. Why my dear, it you don't—just think! the Thorn's will be in a state—I should prefer to go through a hedge of any description rather than meet the trying demonstrations which will encounter me on every side."

"I am going to Mrs. Decatur's," said Fleda; "she invited me first, and I owe it to her, she has asked me so often and so kindly."

"I shouldn't think you'd enjoy yourself there," said Florence; "they don't talk a bit of English these nights. If I was going, my dear, I would act as your interpreter, but my destiny lies in another direction."

"If I cannot make anybody understand my French, I will get somebody to condescend to my English," said Fleda.

"Why, do you talk French?" was the instant question from both mouths.

"Unless she has forgotten herself strangely," said Charlton. "Talk! she will talk to anybody's satisfaction—that happens to differ from her; and I think her tongue cares very little which language it wags in. There is no danger about Fleda's enjoying herself where people are talking."

Fleda laughed at him, and the Evelyns rather stared at them both. "But we are all going to Mrs. Thorn's? you can't go alone?"

"I will make Charlton take me," said Fleda, "or rather, I will take him, if he will let me. Will you, Charlton? will you take care of me to Mrs. Decatur's to-morrow night?"

"With the greatest of pleasure, my dear coz.; but I have another engagement in the course of the evening."

"Oh, that is nothing," said Fleda; "if you will only go with me, that is all I care for. You needn't stay but ten minutes. And you can call for me," she added, turning to the Evelyns, "as you come back from Mrs. Thorn's." To this no objection could be made, and the ensuing raillery

Fleda bore with steadiness at least if not with coolness; for Charlton heard it, and she was distressed.

She went to Mrs. Decatur's the next evening in greater elation of spirits than she had known since she left her uncle's; delighted to be missing from the party at Mrs. Thorn's, and hoping that Mr. Lewis would be satisfied with this very plain hint of her mind. A little pleased, too, to feel quite free, alone from too friendly eyes, and ears that had too lively a concern in her sayings and doings. She did not in the least care about going to Mrs. Decatur's; her joy was that she was not at the other place. But there never was elation so outwardly quiet. Nobody would have suspected its existence.

The evening was near half over when Mr. Carleton came in. Fleda had half hoped he would be there, and now immediately hoped she might have a chance to see him alone and to thank him for his flowers; she had not been able to do that yet. He presently came up to speak to her, just as Charlton, who had found attraction enough to keep him so long, came to tell her he was going.

"You are looking better," said the former, as gravely as ever, but with an eye of serious interest that made the words something.—"I am better," said Fleda gratefully.

"So much better that she is in a hurry to make herself worse," said her cousin. "Mr. Carleton, you are a professor of medicine, I believe; I have an indistinct impression of your having once prescribed a ride on horseback for somebody; wouldn't you recommend some measure of prudence to her consideration?"

"In general," Mr. Carleton answered gravely; "but in the present case I could not venture upon any special prescription, Capt. Rossitur."

"As for instance, that she should remain in New York till she is fit to leave it? By the way, what brought you here again in such a hurry, Fleda! I haven't heard that yet."

The question was rather sudden. Fleda was a little taken by surprise; her face showed some pain and confusion both. Mr. Carleton prevented her answer, she could not tell whether with design.

"What imprudence do you charge your cousin with, Capt. Rossitur?"

"Why she is in a great hurry to get back to Queechy before she is able to go anywhere—begging me to find an escort for her. It is lucky I can't. I didn't know I ever should be glad to be 'posted up' in this fashion, but I am."

"You have not sought very far, Capt. Rossitur," said the voice of Thorn behind him. "Here is one that will be very happy to attend Miss Fleda whenever she pleases."

Fleda's shocked start and change of countenance was seen by more eyes than one pair. Thorn's fell, and a shade crossed his countenance, too, for an instant, that Fleda's vision was too dazzled to see. Mr. Carleton moved away.

"Why are *you* going to Queechy?" said Charlton astonished. His friend was silent a moment, perhaps for want of power to speak. Fleda dared not look at him.

"It is not impossible, unless this lady forbid me. I am not a fixture."

"But what brought you here, man, to offer your services?" said Charlton; "most ungallantly leaving so many pairs of bright eyes to shine upon your absence."

"Mr. Thorn will not find himself in darkness here, Capt. Rossitur," said Mrs. Decatur.

"It's my opinion he ought, ma'am," said Charlton.

"It is my opinion every man ought, who makes his dependence on gleams of sunshine," said Mr. Thorn rather cynically. "I cannot say I was thinking of brightness before or behind me."

"I should think not," said Charlton; "you don't look as if you had seen any in a good while."

"A light goes out every now and then," said Thorn, "and it take's one's eyes some time to get accustomed to it. What a singular world we live in, Mrs. Decatur!"

"That is so new an idea," said the lady laughing, "that I must request an explanation."

"What new experience of its singularity has your wisdom made?" said his friend. "I thought you and the world knew each other's faces pretty well before."

"Then you have not heard the news?"—"What news?"

"Hum—I suppose it is not about yet," said Thorn composedly. "No—you haven't heard it."

"But what, man?" said Charlton, "let's hear your news, for I must be off."—"Why—but it is no more than rumour yet—but it is said that strange things are coming to light about a name that used to be held in very high respect."

"In this city?"—"In this city? yes—it is said proceedings are afoot against one of our oldest citizens, on charge of a very grave offence."

"Who? and what offence? What do you mean?"

"Is it a secret, Mr. Thorn?" said Mrs. Decatur.

"If you have not heard, perhaps it is as well not to mention names too soon; if it comes out it will be all over directly; possibly the family may hush it up, and in that case the less said the better; but those have it in hand that will not let it slip through their fingers."

Mrs. Decatur turned away, saying "how shocking such things were;" and Thorn, with a smile which did not however light up his face, said,—"You may be off, Charlton, with no concern for the bright eyes you leave behind you; I will endeavour to atone for my negligence elsewhere by my mindfulness of them."

"Don't excuse you," said Charlton; but his eye catching at the moment another attraction opposite in the form of man or woman, instead of quitting the room he leisurely crossed it to speak to the new-comer; and Thorn, with an entire change of look and manner, pressed forward and offered his arm to Fleda, who was looking perfectly white. If his words had needed any commentary it was given by his eye as it met hers in speaking the last sentence to Mrs. Decatur. No one was near whom she knew, and Mr. Thorn led her out to a little back room where the gentlemen had thrown off their cloaks, where the air was fresher, and placing her on a seat stood waiting before her till she could speak to him.

"What do you mean, Mr. Thorn?" Fleda looked as much as said, when she could meet his face.

"I may rather ask you what *you* mean, Miss Fleda," he answered gravely. Fleda drew breath painfully.

"I mean nothing," she said, lowering her head again; "I have done nothing."

"Did you think I meant nothing when I agreed to do all you wished?"—"I thought you said you would do it freely," she said, with a tone of voice that might have touched anybody, there was such a sinking of heart in it.

"Didn't you understand me?"

"And is it all over now?" said Fleda, after a pause.

"Not yet—but it soon may be. A weak hand may stop it now; it will soon be beyond the power of the strongest."

"And what becomes of your promise that it should no more be heard of?" said Fleda, looking up at him with a colourless face, but eyes that put the question forcibly nevertheless.

"Is any promise bound to stand without its conditions?"—"I made no conditions," said Fleda quickly.

"Forgive me,—but did you not permit me to understand them?"—"No! or if I did I could not help it."

"Did you say that you wished to help it?" said he, gently.—"I must say so now, then, Mr. Thorn," said Fleda, withdrawing the hand he had taken; "I did not mean or wish you to think so, but I was too ill to speak—almost to know what I did; it was not my fault——"

"You do not make it mine, that I chose such a time, selfishly, I grant, to draw from your lips the words that are more to me than life?"

"Cannot you be generous?"—*for once*, she was very near saying.

"Where you are concerned, I do not know how."

Fleda was silent a moment, and then bowed her face in her hands.

"May I not ask that question of you?" said he, bending down and endeavouring to remove them; "will you not say—or look—that word that will make others happy beside me?"—"I cannot, sir."

"Not for their sakes?" he said calmly.—"Can you ask me to do for theirs what I would not for my own?"

"Yes—for mine," he said, with a meaning deliberateness. Fleda was silent, with a face of white determination.

"It will be beyond *eluding*, as beyond recall, the second time. I may seem selfish—I am selfish; but dear Miss Ringgan you do not see all; you who make me so can make me anything else with a touch of your hand; it is selfishness that would be bound to your happiness, if you did but entrust it to me."

Fleda neither spoke nor looked at him and rose up from her chair.

"Is this *your* generosity?" he said, pointedly though gently.

"That is not the question now, sir," said Fleda, who was trembling painfully. "I cannot do evil that good may come."

"But *evil?*" said he detaining her, "what evil do I ask of you?—to *remove* evil, I do."

Fleda clasped her hands, but answered calmly—

"I cannot make any pretences, sir; I cannot promise to give what is not in my power."—"In whose power then?" said he quickly.

A feeling of indignation came to Fleda's aid, and she turned away. But he stopped her still.

"Do you think I do not understand?" he said with a covert sneer that had the keenness and hardness and the brightness of steel.—"*I* do not, sir," said Fleda.

"Do you think I do not know whom you came here to meet?"—Fleda's glance of reproach was a most innocent one, but it did not check him.

"Has that fellow renewed his old admiration of you?" he went on in the same tone.—"Do not make me desire his old protection," said Fleda, her gentle face roused to a flush of displeasure.

"Protection!" said Charlton coming in, "who wants protection? here it is—protection from what? my old friend Lewis? What the deuce does this lady want of protection, Mr. Thorn?"

It was plain enough that Fleda wanted it, from the way she was drooping upon his arm.

"You may ask the lady herself," said Thorn, in the same tone he had before used; "I have not the honour to be her spokesman."

"She don't need one," said Charlton, "I addressed myself to you—speak for yourself, man."

"I am not sure that it would be her pleasure I should," said Thorn. "Shall I tell this gentleman, Miss Ringgan, who needs protection, and from what?"

Fleda raised her head, and putting her hand on his arm looked a concentration of entreaty—lips were sealed.

"Will you give me," said he gently taking the hand in his own, "your sign manual for Capt. Rossitur's security? It is not too late. Ask it of her, sir!"

"What does this mean?" said Charlton looking from his cousin to his friend.—"You shall have the pleasure of knowing, sir, just so soon as I find it convenient."

"I will have a few words with you on this subject, my fine fellow?" said Capt. Rossitur, as the other was preparing to leave the room.—"You had better speak to somebody else," said Thorn. "But I am ready."

Charlton muttered an imprecation upon his absurdity, and turned his attention to Fleda, who needed it. And yet desired anything else. For a moment she had an excuse for not answering his questions in her inability; and then opportunely Mrs. Decatur came in to look after her; and she was followed by her daughter. Fleda roused all her powers to conceal and command her feelings; rallied herself; said she had been a little weak and faint; drank water, and declared herself

able to go back into the drawing-room. To go home would have been her utmost desire, but at the instant her energies were all bent to the one point of putting back thought and keeping off suspicion. And in the first hurry and bewilderment of distress the dread of finding herself alone with Charlton till she had had time to collect her thoughts would of itself have been enough to prevent her accepting the proposal.

She entered the drawing room again on Mrs. Decatur's arm, and had stood a few minutes talking or listening, with that same concentration of all her faculties upon the effort to bear up outwardly, when Charlton came up to ask if he should leave her. Fleda made no objection, and he was out of her sight, far enough to be beyond reach or recall, when it suddenly struck her, that she ought not to have let him go without speaking to him, without entreating him to see her in the morning before he saw Thorn. The sickness of this new apprehension was too much for poor Fleda's power of keeping up. She quietly drew her arm from Mrs. Decatur's, saying that she would sit down ; and sought out a place for herself apart from the rest by an engraving stand ; where for a little while, not to seem unoccupied, she turned over print after print that she did not see. Even that effort failed at last ; and she sat gazing at one of Sir Thomas Lawrence's bright-faced children, and feeling as if in herself the tides of life were setting back upon their fountain preparatory to being still for ever. She became sensible that someone was standing beside the engravings, and looked up at Mr. Carleton.

" Are you ill ? " he said, very gently and tenderly.

The answer was a quick motion of Fleda's hand to her head, speaking sudden pain, and perhaps sudden difficulty of self-command. She did not speak.

" Will you have anything ? "—A whisper, " no."

" Would you like to return to Mrs. Evelyn's ? I have a carriage here."

With a look of relief that seemed to welcome him as her good angel, Fleda instantly rose up, and took the arm he offered her. She would have hastened from the room then, but he gently checked her pace ; and Fleda was immediately grateful for the quiet and perfect shielding from observation that his manner secured her. He went with her up the stairs, and to the very door of the dressing-room. Then Fleda hurried on her shoes and mufflers in trembling fear that some one might come and find her ; gained Mr. Carleton's arm again, and was placed in the carriage.

The drive was in perfect silence, and Fleda's agony deepened and strengthened with every minute. She had freedom to think, and thought did but carry a torch into chamber after chamber of misery. There seemed nothing to be done. She could not get hold of Charlton; and if she could? Nothing could be less amenable than his passions to her gentle restraints. Mr. Thorn was still less approachable or manageable, except in one way, that she did not even think of. His insinuations about Mr. Carleton did not leave even a tinge of embarrassment upon her mind; they were cast from her as insulting absurdities, which she could not think of a second time without shame. The carriage rolled on with them a long time, without a word being said. Mr. Carleton knew that she was not weeping nor faint. But as the light of the lamps was now and then cast within the carriage he saw that her face looked ghastly; and he saw too that its expression was not of a quiet sinking under sorrow, nor of an endeavour to bear up against it, but a wild searching gaze into the darkness of *possibilities*. They had near reached Mrs. Evelyn's.

"I cannot see you so," he said, gently touching the hand which lay listlessly beside him. "You are ill!"

Again the same motion of the other hand to her face, the quick token of great pain suddenly stirred.—"For the sake of old times, let me ask," said he, "can nothing be done?"

Those very gentle and delicate tones of sympathy and kindness were too much to bear. The hand was snatched away to be pressed to her face. Oh that those old times were back again, and she a child that could ask his protection! No one to give it now. He was silent a moment. Fleda's head bowed beneath the mental pressure.

"Has Dr. Gregory returned?"

The negative answer was followed by a half-uttered exclamation of longing, checked midway, but sufficiently expressive of her want.

"Do you trust me?" he said after another second of pausing.

"Perfectly!" said Fleda amidst her tears, too much excited to know what she was saying, and in her simplicity half forgetting that she was not a child still; "more than any one in the world!"

The few words he had spoken, and the manner of them, had curiously borne her back years in a minute; she seemed to be under his care more than for the drive home. He did not

speak again for a minute; when he did his tone was very quiet and lower than before.

"Give me what a friend *can* have in charge to do for you, and it shall be done."—Fleda raised her head and looked out of the window in a silence of doubt. The carriage stopped at Mrs. Evelyn's.

"Not now," said Mr. Carleton, as the servant was about to open the door; "drive round the square till I speak to you."

Fleda was motionless and almost breathless with uncertainty. If Charlton could be hindered from meeting Mr. Thorn; but how could Mr. Carleton effect it? But there was that in him or in his manner which invariably created confidence in his ability, or fear of it, even in strangers; and how much more in her who had a childish but very clear recollection of several points in his character which confirmed the feeling. And might not something be done, through his means, to facilitate her uncle's escape? of whom she seemed to herself now the betrayer. But to tell him the story! a person of his high, nice notions of character; what a distance it would put even between his friendship and her; but that thought was banished instantly, with one glance at Mr. Thorn's imputation of ungenerousness. To sacrifice herself to *him* would not have been generosity; to lower herself in the esteem of a different character, she felt, called for it. There was time even then, too, for one swift thought of the needlessness and bitter fruits of wrong doing. But here they were; should she make them known?—and trouble Mr. Carleton, friend though he were, with these miserable matters in which he had no concern? She sat with a beating heart and a very troubled brow, but a brow as easy to read as a child's. It was the trouble of anxious questioning. Mr. Carleton watched it for a little while, undecided as ever, and more pained.

"You said you trusted me," he said quietly, taking her hand again.

"But—I don't know what you could do, Mr. Carleton," Fleda said with a trembling voice.

"Will you let me be the judge of that?"

"I cannot bear to trouble you with these miserable things."

"You cannot," said he with that same quiet tone, "but by thinking and saying so. I can have no greater pleasure than to take pains for you."

Fleda heard these words precisely and with the same simplicity as a child would have heard them, and answered with

a very frank burst of tears,—soon, as soon as possible, according to her custom, driven back; though even in the act of quieting herself they broke forth again as uncontrollably as at first. But Mr. Carleton had not long to wait. She raised her head again after a short struggle, with the wonted look of patience sitting upon her brow, and, wiping away her tears, paused merely for breath and voice. He was perfectly silent.

"Mr. Carleton, I will tell you," she began; "I hardly know whether I ought or ought not," and her hand went to her forehead for a moment; "but I cannot think to-night—and I have not a friend to apply to——" She hesitated; and then went on, with a voice that trembled and quavered sadly.

"Mr. Thorn has a secret of my uncle's in his power, which he promised, without conditions, to keep faithfully; and now he insists that he will not, but upon conditions."

"And cannot the conditions be met?"

"No—and oh,—I may as well tell you at once!" said Fleda in bitter sorrow; "it is a crime that he committed!"

"Mr. Thorn?"—"No, oh no!" said Fleda, weeping bitterly; "not he!"

Her agitation was excessive for a moment; then she threw it off, and spoke more collectedly, though with exceeding depression of manner.

"It was long ago—when he was in trouble—he put Mr. Thorn's name to a note, and never was able to take it up; and nothing was ever heard about it till lately; and last week he was going to leave the country, and Mr. Thorn promised that the proceedings should be entirely given up; and that was why I came to town, to find uncle Rolf and bring him home; and I did, and he is gone; and now Mr. Thorn says it is all going on again and that he will not escape this time; and I have done it!" Fleda writhed again in distress.

"Thorn promised without conditions?"—"Certainly, he promised freely; and now he insists upon them; and you see uncle Rolf would have been safe out of the country now, if it hadn't been for me!"

"I think I can undo this snarl," said Mr. Carleton calmly.

"But that is not all," said Fleda a little quieted; "Charlton came in this evening when we were talking, and he was surprised to find me so, and Mr. Thorn was in a very ill humour, and some words passed between them; and Charlton threatened to see him again; and oh, if he does!" said poor Fleda,

"that will finish our difficulties! for Charlton is very hot, and I know how it will end—how it must end."

"Where is your cousin to be found?"

"I don't know where he lodges when he is in town."

"You did not leave him at Mrs. Decatur's. Do you know where he is this evening?"

"Yes!" said Fleda, wondering that she should have heard and remembered; "he said he was going to meet a party of his brother officers at Mme. Fouché's—a sister-in-law of his colonel, I believe."

"I know her. This note—was it in the name of the young Mr. Thorn, or of his father that was used?"—"Of his father."

"Has *he* appeared at all in this business?"—"No," said Fleda, feeling for the first time that there was something notable about it.

"What sort of person do you take him to be?"

"Very kind, very pleasant, always, he has been to me, and I should think to everybody, very unlike the son."

Mr. Carleton had ordered the coachman back to Mrs. Evelyn's.

"Do you know the amount of the note? It may be desirable that I should not appear uninformed."

"It was for four thousand dollars," said Fleda, in the low voice of shame.

"And when given?"—"I don't know exactly—but six years ago—some time in the winter of '43, it must have been."

He said no more till the carriage stopped; and then before handing her out of it, lifted her hand to his lips. That carried all the promise Fleda wanted from him. How oddly, how curiously, her hand kept the feeling of that kiss upon it all night.

CHAPTER XLV

Heat not a furnace for your friend so hot
That it may singe yourself.—*Shakespeare.*

MR. CARLETON went to Mme. Fouché's, who received most graciously, as any lady would, his apology for introducing himself unlooked-for, and begged that he would commit the same fault often. As soon as practicable he made his way to Charlton, and invited him to breakfast with him the next morning.

Mrs. Carleton always said it never was known that Guy was refused anything he had a mind to ask. Charlton, though taken by surprise, and certainly not too much prepossessed in his favour, was won by an influence that where its owner chose to exert it was generally found irresistible; and not only accepted the invitation, but was conscious to himself of doing it with a good deal of pleasure. Even when Mr. Carleton made the further request that Capt. Rossitur would in the meantime see no one on business of any kind, intimating that the reason would then be given, Charlton, though startling a little at this restraint upon his freedom of motion, could do no other than give the desired promise, and with the utmost readiness. Guy then went to Mr. Thorn's. It was by this time not early.

"Mr. Lewis Thorn—is he at home?"—"He is, sir," said the servant admitting him rather hesitatingly.

"I wish to see him a few moments on business."

"It is no hour for business," said the voice of Mr. Lewis from over the balusters; "I can't see anybody to-night."

"I ask but a few minutes," said Mr. Carleton. "It is important."

"It may be anything!" said Thorn. "I won't do business after twelve o'clock."

Mr. Carleton desired the servant to carry his card, with the same request, to Mr. Thorn the elder.

"What's that?" said Thorn as the man came upstairs,—"my father?—Pshaw! *he* can't attend to it. Well, walk up sir, if you please! may as well have it over and done with it."

Mr. Carleton mounted the stairs and followed the young gentleman into an apartment to which he rapidly led the way.

"You have no objection to this, I suppose?" Thorn remarked as he locked the door behind him.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Carleton coolly, taking out the key and putting it in his pocket; "my business is private, it needs no witnesses."

"Especially as it so nearly concerns yourself," said Thorn sneeringly.

"Which part of it, sir?" said Mr. Carleton with admirable breeding. It vexed at the same time that it constrained Thorn.

"I'll let you know presently!" he said, hurriedly proceeding to the lower end of the room where some cabinets stood, and unlocking door after door in mad haste.

The place had somewhat the air of a study, perhaps Thorn's private room. A long table stood in the middle of the floor, with materials for writing, and a good many books were about the room, in cases and on the tables, with maps and engravings and portfolios and a nameless collection of articles, the miscellaneous gathering of a man of leisure and some literary taste.

Their owner presently came back from the cabinets with tokens of a very different kind about him.

"There sir!" he said, offering to his guest a brace of most inhospitable-looking pistols; "take one, and take your stand, as soon as you please, nothing like coming to the point at once!"

He was heated and excited even more than his manner indicated. Mr. Carleton glanced at him and stood quietly examining the pistol he had taken. It was all ready loaded.

"This is a business that comes upon me by surprise," he said calmly. "I don't know what I have to do with this, Mr. Thorn."

"Well I do," said Thorn, "and that's enough. Take your place, sir! You escaped me once, but"—and he gave his words dreadful emphasis—"You won't do it the second time!"

"You do not mean," said the other, "that your recollection of such an offence has lived out so many years?"

"No sir! no sir!" said Thorn, "it is not that. I despise it, as I do the offender. You have touched me more nearly."

"Let me know in what," said Mr. Carleton turning his pistol's mouth down upon the table and leaning on it.

"You know already, what do you ask me for?" said Thorn who was foaming; "if you say you don't you lie heartily. I'll tell you nothing, but out of *this*——"

"I have not knowingly injured you, sir, in a whit."

"Then a Carleton may be a liar," said Thorn, "and you are one, I dare say not the first. Put yourself there, sir, will you?"

"Well," said Guy carelessly, "if it is decreed that I am to

fight, of course there's no help for it; but as I have business on hand that might not be so well done afterwards I must beg your attention to that in the first place."

"No, sir," said Thorn, "I'll attend to nothing. I'll hear nothing from you. I know you! I'll not hear a word. I'll see to the business! Take your stand."

"I will not have anything to do with pistols," said Mr. Carleton coolly, laying his out of his hand; "they make too much noise."

"Who cares for the noise?" said Thorn. "It won't hurt you; and the door is locked."

"But people's ears are not," said Guy.

Neither tone nor attitude nor look had changed in the least its calm gracefulness. It began to act upon Thorn.

"Well, in the devil's name have your own way," said he throwing down his pistol too, and going back to the cabinets, at the lower end of the room, "there are rapiers here, if you like them better, *I* don't, the shortest the best for me; but here they are, take your choice."

Guy examined them carefully for a few minutes, and then laid them both, with a firm hand upon them, on the table.

"I will choose neither, Mr. Thorn, till you have heard me. I came here to see you on the part of others—I should be a recreant to my charge if I allowed you or myself to draw me into anything that might prevent my fulfilling it. That must be done first."

Thorn looked with a lowering brow on the indications of his opponent's eye and attitude; they left him plainly but one course to take.

"Well speak and have done," he said as in spite of himself; "but I know it already."—"I am here as a friend of Mr. Rossitur."

"Why don't you say a friend of somebody else, and come nearer the truth?" said Thorn. There was an intensity of expression in his sneer, but pain was there as well as anger; and it was with even a feeling of pity that Mr. Carleton answered, "The truth will be best reached, sir, if I am allowed to choose my own words."

There was no haughtiness in the steady gravity of the speech, whatever there was in the quite silence he permitted to follow. Thorn did not break it.

"I am informed of the particulars concerning this prosecution of Mr. Rossitur. I am come here to know if no terms can be obtained."

"No," said Thorn, "no terms, I won't speak of terms. The matter will be followed up now till the fellow is lodged in jail, where he deserves to be."

"Are you aware, sir, that this, if done, will be the cause of a very great distress to a family who have *not* deserved it?"

"That can't be helped," said Thorn. "Of course it must cause distress, but you can't act upon that. Of course when a man turns rogue he ruins his family, that's part of his punishment, and a just one."

"The law is just," said Mr. Carleton, "but a friend may be merciful."

"I don't pretend to be a friend," said Thorn viciously, "and I have no cause to be merciful. I like to bring a man to public shame when he has forfeited his title to any thing else; and I intend that Mr. Rossitur shall become intimately acquainted with the interior of the State's Prison."

"Did it ever occur to you that public shame *might* fall upon other than Mr. Rossitur? and without the State Prison?"

Thorn fixed a somewhat startled look upon the steady powerful eye of his opponent, and did not like its meaning.

"You must explain yourself, sir," he said haughtily.

"I am acquainted with *all* the particulars of this proceeding, Mr. Thorn. If it goes abroad, so surely will they."

"She told you, did she?" said Thorn in a sudden flash of fury.

Mr. Carleton was silent, with his air of imperturbable reserve, telling and expressing nothing but a cool independence that put the world at a distance.

"Ha!" said Thorn, "it is easy to see why our brave Englishman comes here to solicit 'terms' for his honest friend Rossitur, he would not like the scandal of franking letters to Sing Sing. Come sir," he said snatching up the pistol, "our business is ended, come, I say! or I won't wait for you."

But the pistol was struck from his hand.

"Not yet," said Mr. Carleton, calmly "you shall have your turn at these—mind I promise you; but my business must be done first, till then, let them alone!"

"Well what is it?" said Thorn impatiently. "Rossitur will be a convict, I tell you; so you'll have to give up all thoughts of his niece, or pocket her shame along with her. What more have you got to say? that's all your business, I take it."

—"You are mistaken, Mr. Thorn," said Mr. Carleton gravely.

"Am I? In what?"—"In every position of your last speech."

"It don't affect your plans and views, I suppose, personally, whether this prosecution is continued or not?"—"It does not in the least."

"It is indifferent to you, I suppose, what sort of a queen consort you carry to your little throne of provinciality down yonder?"

"I will reply to you, sir, when you come back to the subject," said Mr. Carleton coldly.

"You mean to say that your pretensions have not been in the way of mine?"—"I have made none, sir."

"Doesn't she like you?"—"I have never asked her."

"Then what possessed her to tell you all this to-night?"—"Simply because I was an old friend and the only one at hand, I presume."

"And you do not look for any reward of your services, of course?"—"I wish for none, sir, but her relief."

"Well, it don't signify," said Thorn with a mixture of expressions in his face, "if I believe you, which I don't; it don't signify a hair what you do, when once this matter is known. I should never think of advancing *my* pretensions to a felon's family." "You know that the lady in whose welfare you take so much interest will in that case suffer aggravated distress as having been the means of hindering Mr. Rossitur's escape." "Can't help it," said Thorn, beating the table with a ruler; "so she has; she must suffer for it. It isn't my fault." "You are willing then to abide the consequences of a full disclosure of all the circumstances? for part will not come out without the whole."

"There is happily nobody to tell them," said Thorn with a sneer.

"Pardon me—they will not only be told, but known thoroughly in all the circles in this country that know Mr. Thorn's name."

"*The lady*," said Thorn in the same tone, "would hardly relish such a publication of *her* name—*her welfare* would be scantily advantaged by it."

"I will take the risk of that upon myself," said Mr. Carleton quietly; "and the charge of the other."

"You dare not!" said Thorn. "You shall not go alive out of this room to do it! Let me have it, sir! you said you would——"

His passion was at an fearful height, for the family pride which had been appealed to felt a touch of fear, and his other thoughts were confirmed again, besides the dim vision of a

possible thwarting of all his plans. Desire almost concentrated itself upon revenge against the object that threatened them. He had thrown himself again towards the weapons which lay beyond his reach, but was met and forcibly withheld from them.—"Stand back!" said Mr. Carleton. "I said I would, but I am not ready; finish this business first."

"What is there to finish?" said Thorn furiously; "you will never live to do anything out of these doors again—you are mocking yourself."—"My life is not in your hands, sir, and I will settle this matter before I put it in peril. If not with you, with Mr. Thorn your father, to whom it more properly belongs."

"You cannot leave the room to see him," said Thorn sneeringly. "That is at my pleasure," said the other, "unless hindered by means I do not think you will use." Thorn was silent.

"Will you yield anything of justice, once more, in favour of this distressed family?"—"That is, yield the whole, and let the guilty go free?"

"When the punishment of the offender would involve that of so many unoffending, who in this case would feel it with peculiar severity."

"He deserves it, if it was only for the money he has kept me out of—he ought to be made to refund what he has stolen, if it took the skin off his back!"

"That part of his obligation," said Mr. Carleton, "I am authorized to discharge, on condition of having the note given up. I have a cheque with me which I am commissioned to fill up, from one of the best names here. I need only the date of the note, which the giver of the cheque did not know."

Thorn hesitated, again tapping the table with the ruler in a troubled manner. He knew by the calm erect figure before him and the steady eye he did not care to meet that the threat of disclosure would be kept. He was not prepared to brave it, in case his revenge should fail; and if it did not——

"It is deuced folly," he said at length with a half laugh, "for I shall have it back again in five minutes, if my eye don't play me a trick; however, if you will have it so, I don't care. There are chances in all things——"

He went again to the cabinets, and presently brought the endorsed note. Mr. Carleton give it a cool and careful examination, to satisfy himself of its being the true one; and then delivered him the cheque; the blank duly filled up.

"There are chances in nothing, sir," he said, as he proceeded to burn the note effectually in the candle.

"What do you mean?"—"I mean that there is a Supreme Disposer of all things, who among the rest has our lives in His hand. And now, sir, I will give you that chance at my life for which you have been so eagerly wishing."

"Well, take your place," said Thorn seizing his pistol, "and take your arms—put yourself at the end of the table ——!"

"I shall stand here," said Mr. Carleton, quietly folding his arms; "you may take your place where you please."

"But you are not armed!" said Thorn impatiently, "why don't you get ready? what are you waiting for?"

"I have nothing to do with arms," said Mr. Carleton smiling; "I have no wish to hurt you, Mr. Thorn; I bear you no ill-will. But you may do what you please with me."

"But you promised!" said Thorn in desperation.

"I abide by my promise, sir."

Thorn's pistol hand fell; he looked *dreadfully*. There was a silence of several minutes. "Well?" said Mr. Carleton, looking up and smiling.

"I can do nothing unless you will," said Thorn hoarsely, and looking hurriedly away.—"I am at your pleasure, sir! But on my own part I have none to gratify."

There was silence again, during which Thorn's face was pitiable in its darkness. He did not stir.

"I did not come here in enmity, Mr. Thorn," said Guy, after a little approaching him; "I have none now. If you believe me you will throw away the remains of yours, and take my hand in pledge of it."

Thorn was ashamed and confounded, in the midst of passions that made him at the moment a mere wreck of himself. He inwardly drew back exceedingly from the proposal. But the grace with which the words were said wrought upon all the gentlemanly character that belonged to him, and made it impossible not to comply. The pistol was exchanged for Mr. Carleton's hand.

"I need not assure you," said the latter, "that nothing of what we have talked of to-night shall ever be known or suspected, in any quarter, unless by your means." Thorn's answer was merely a bow, and Mr. Carleton withdrew, his quondam antagonist lighting him ceremoniously to the door.

It was easy for Mr. Carleton the next morning to deal with his guest at the breakfast-table. The appointments of the

service were such as of themselves to put Charlton in a good humour, if he had not come already provided with that happy qualification; and the powers of manner and conversation which his entertainer brought into play not only put them into the background of Capt. Rossitur's perceptions, but even made him merge certain other things in fascination, and lose all thought of what probably had called him there. Once before, he had known Mr. Carleton come out in a like manner, but this time he forgot to be surprised. The meal was two-thirds over before the business that had drawn them together was alluded to.

"I made an odd request of you last night, Capt. Rossitur," said his host; "you haven't asked for an explanation."—"I had forgotten all about it," said Rossitur candidly. "I am *inconsequent* enough myself not to think everything odd that requires an explanation."

"Then I hope you will pardon me if mine seem to touch upon what is not my concern. You had some cause to be displeased with Mr. Thorn's behaviour last night?"

"Who told you as much?" was in Rossitur's open eyes, and upon his tongue; but few ever asked naughty questions of Mr. Carleton. Charlton's eyes came back, not indeed to their former dimensions, but to his plate, in silence.

"He was incomprehensible," he said after a minute, "and didn't act like himself: I don't know what was the matter. I shall call him to account for it."

"Capt. Rossitur, I am going to ask you a favour."

"I will grant it with the greatest pleasure," said Charlton, "if it lie within my power."

"A wise man's addition," said Mr. Carleton; "but I trust you will not think me extravagant. I will hold myself much obliged to you if you will let Mr. Thorn's folly, or impertinence, go this time without notice."

Charlton absolutely laid down his knife in astonishment; while at the same moment this slight led to the assertion of his dignity aroused it to uncommon pugnaciousness.

"Sir—Mr. Carleton," he stammered, "I would be very happy to grant anything in my power; but this, sir, really goes beyond it."

"Permit me to say," said Mr. Carleton, "that I have myself seen Thorn upon the business that occasioned his discomposure, and that it has been satisfactorily arranged; so that nothing more is to be gained or desired from a second interview."

Who gave you authority to do any such thing? was again in Charlton's eyes, and an odd twinge crossed his mind; but as before his thoughts were silent. "*My* part of the business cannot have been arranged," he said, "for it lies in a question or two that I must put to the gentleman myself."

"What will that question or two probably end in?" said Mr. Carleton significantly.—"I can't tell!" said Rossitur; "depends on himself—it will end according to his answers."

"Is his offence so great that it cannot be forgiven upon my entreaty?"—"Mr. Carleton!" said Rossitur, "I would gladly pleasure you, sir, but you see, this is a thing a man owes to himself."

"What thing, sir?"—"Why, not to suffer impertinence to be offered him with impunity."

"Even though the punishment extends to hearts at home that must feel it far more heavily than the offender?"

"Would you suffer yourself to be insulted, Mr. Carleton?" said Rossitur, by way of a mouth-stopper. "Not if I could help it," said Mr. Carleton smiling; "but if such a misfortune happened I don't know how it would be repaired by being made a matter of life and death."

"But honour might," said Rossitur.—"Honour is not reached, Capt. Rossitur. Honour dwells in a strong citadel, and a squib against the walls does in no wise affect their security."

"But also it is not consistent with honour to sit still and suffer it."—"Question. The firing of a cracker, I think, hardly warrants a sally."

"It calls for chastisement though," said Rossitur a little shortly.—"I don't know that," said Mr Carleton gravely. "We have it on the highest authority that it is the glory of man to *pass by* a transgression."

"But you can't go by that," said Charlton a little fidgeted; "the world wouldn't get along so; men must take care of themselves."—"Certainly. But what part of themselves is cared for in this resenting of injuries?"

"Why, their good name!"

"As how affected? pardon me."—"By the world's opinion," said Rossitur; "which stamps every man with something worse than infamy who cannot protect his own standing."

"That is to say," said Mr. Carleton seriously, "that Capt. Rossitur will punish a fool's words with death, or visit the last extremity of distress upon those who are dearest to him, rather than leave the world in any doubt of his prowess."

"Mr. Carleton!" said Rossitur colouring. "What do you mean by speaking so, sir?"—"Not to displease you, Capt. Rossitur."

"Then you count the world's opinion for nothing?"—"For less than nothing—compared with the regards I have named."

"You would brave it without scruple?"—"I do not call him a brave man who would not, sir."

"I remember," said Charlton, half laughing, "you did it yourself once; and I must confess I believe nobody thought you lost anything by it."

"But forgive me for asking," said Mr. Carleton, "is this terrible world a party to *this* matter? In the request which I made, and which I have not given up, sir, do I presume upon any more than the sacrifice of a little private feeling!"

"Why, yes," said Charlton looking somewhat puzzled, "for I promised the fellow I would see to it, and I must keep my word."

"And you know how that will of necessity issue."

"I can't consider that, sir; that is a secondary matter. I must do what I told him I would."

"At all hazards?" said Mr. Carleton.

"What hazards?"—"Not hazards, but certainty—of incurring a reckoning far less easy to deal with."

"What, do you mean with yourself?" said Rossitur.

"No, sir," said Mr. Carleton, a shade of even sorrowful expression crossing his face; "I mean with One whose displeasure is a more weighty matter; One who has declared very distinctly, 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

"I am sorry for it," said Rossitur, after a disturbed pause of some minutes. "I wish you had asked me anything else; but we can't take this thing in the light you do, sir. I wish Thorn had been in any spot of the world but at Mrs Decatur's last night, or that Fleda hadn't taken me there; but since he was, there is no help for it, I must make him account for his behaviour, to her as well as to me. I really don't know how to help it, sir."

"Let me beg you to reconsider that," Mr. Carleton said with a smile which disarmed offence, "for if you will not help it, I must."

Charlton looked in doubt for a moment and then asked "how he would help it?"

"In that case, I shall think it my duty to have you bound over to keep the peace." He spoke gravely now, and with

that quiet tone which always carries conviction. Charlton stared unmistakably, and in silence.

"You are not in earnest?" he then said.

"I trust you will permit me to leave you for ever in doubt on that point," said Mr. Carleton, with again a slight giving way of the muscles of his face.

"I cannot indeed," said Rossitur. "Do you mean what you said just now?"—"Entirely."

"But Mr. Carleton," said Rossitur, flushing and not knowing exactly how to take him up, "is this the manner of one gentleman towards another?"

He had not chosen right, for he received no answer but an absolute quietness which needed no interpretation. Charlton was vexed and confused, but somehow it did not come into his head to pick a quarrel with his host, in spite of his irritation. That was perhaps because he felt it to be impossible.

"I beg your pardon," he said, most unconsciously verifying Fleda's words in his own person, "but Mr. Carleton, do me the favour to say that I have misunderstood your words. They are incomprehensible to me, sir."

"I must abide by them nevertheless, Capt. Rossitur," Mr. Carleton answered with a smile. "I will not permit this thing to be done, while, as I believe, I have the power to prevent it. You see," he said, smiling again, "I put in practice my own theory."

Charlton looked exceedingly disturbed, and maintained a vexed and irresolute silence for several minutes, realising the extreme disagreeableness of having more than his match to deal with.

"Come, Capt. Rossitur," said the other turning suddenly round upon him, "say that you forgive me for what you know was meant in no disrespect to you?"—"I certainly should not," said Rossitur, yielding however with a half laugh, "if it were not for the truth of the proverb that it takes two to make a quarrel."

"Give me your hand upon that. And now that the question of honour is taken out of your hands, grant, not to me but to those for whom I ask it, your promise to forgive this man."

Charlton hesitated, but it was difficult to resist the request, backed as it was with weight of character and grace of manner, along with its intrinsic reasonableness; and he saw no other way so expedient of getting out of his dilemma.

"I ought to be angry with somebody," he said, half laughing

and a little ashamed; if you will point out any substitute for Thorn I will let him go—since I cannot help myself—with pleasure."

"I will bear it," said Mr. Carleton lightly. "Give me your promise for Thorn, and hold me your debtor in what amount you please."

"Very well—I forgive him," said Rossitur; "and now Mr. Carleton I shall have a reckoning with you some day for this."

"I will meet it. When you are next in England you shall come down to ——shire, and I will give you any satisfaction you please."

They parted in high good-humour; but Charlton looked grave as he went down the staircase; and very oddly all the way down to Whitehall his head was running upon the various excellencies and perfections of his cousin Fleda.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"There is a fortune coming
Towards you, dainty, that will take thee thus,
And set thee aloft."—*Ben Jonson.*

THAT day was spent by Fleda in the never-failing headache which was sure to visit her after any extraordinary nervous agitation or too great mental or bodily trial. It was severe this time, not only from the anxiety of the preceding night, but from the uncertainty that weighed upon her all day long. The person who could have removed the uncertainty came indeed to the house, but she was too ill to see anybody.

The extremity of pain wore itself off with the day, and at evening she was able to leave her room and come downstairs. But she was ill yet, and could do nothing but sit in the corner of the sofa, with her hair unbound, and Florence gently bathing her head with cologne. Anxiety as well as pain had in some measure given place to exhaustion, and she looked a white embodiment of endurance which gave a shock to her friend's

sympathy. Visitors were denied, and Constance and Edith devoted their eyes and tongues at least to her services, if they could do no more.

It happened that Joe Manton was out of the way, holding an important conference with a brother usher next door—a conference that he had no notion would be so important when he began it; when a ring on his own premises summoned one of the maid-servants to the door. She knew nothing about "not at home," and unceremoniously desired the gentleman to "walk up,"—"the ladies were in the drawing-room."

The door had been set wide open for the heat, and Fleda was close in the corner behind it; gratefully permitting Florence's efforts with the cologne, which yet she knew could avail nothing but the kind feelings of the operator; for herself patiently waiting her enemy's time. Constance was sitting on the floor looking at her.—"I can't conceive how you bear so much," she said at length.

Fleda thought how little she knew what was borne!

"Why you could bear it I suppose if you had to," said Edith philosophically.

"She knows she looks most beautiful," said Florence, softly passing her cologned hands down over the smooth hair; "she knows

"'Il faut souffrir pour être belle.'"

"La migraine ne se guérit avec les douceurs," said Mr. Carleton entering; "try something sharp, Miss Evelyn."

"Where are we to get it?" said Constance springing up, and adding in a most lackadaisical aside to her mother, "(Mamma! the fowling-piece!) Our last vinegar hardly comes under the appellation; and you don't expect to find anything volatile in this house, Mr. Carleton?"

He smiled. "Have you none for grave occasions, Miss Constance?"

"I won't retort the question about 'something sharp,'" said Constance arching her eyebrows, "because it is against my principles to make people uncomfortable; but you have certainly brought in some medicine with you, for Miss Ringgan's cheeks a little while ago were as pure as her mind—from a tinge of any sort—and now, you see."

"My dear Constance," said her mother, "Miss Ringgan's cheeks will stand a much better chance if you come away and leave her in peace. How can she get well with such a chatter in her ears."

"Mr. Carleton and I, mamma, are conferring upon measures

of relief, and Miss Ringgan gives token of improvement already."

"For which I am very little to be thanked," said Mr. Carleton. "But I am not a bringer of bad news, that she should look pale at the sight of me."

"Are you a bringer of any news?" said Constance, "Oh, do let us have them, Mr. Carleton! I am dying for news—I haven't heard a bit to-day."

"What is the news, Mr. Carleton?" said her mother's voice, from the more distant region of the fire.

"I believe there are no general news, Mrs. Evelyn."

"Are there any particular news?" said Constance. "I like particular news infinitely the best."

"I am sorry, Miss Constance, I have none for you. But —will this headache yield to nothing?"

"Fleda prophesied that it would to time," said Florence; "she would not let us try much beside."

"And I must confess there has been no volatile agency employed at all," said Constance; "I never knew time have less of it; and Fleda seemed to prefer him for her physician."

"He hasn't been a good one to-day," said Edith, nestling affectionately to her side. "Isn't it better, Fleda?"—for she had covered her eyes with her hand. "Not just now," said Fleda softly.

"Is it fair to change physicians if the first fails," said Mr. Carleton. "I have had a slight experience in headache curing, if you will permit me, Miss Constance, I will supersede time and try a different prescription."

He went out to seek it; and Fleda leaned her head in her hand and tried to quiet the throbbing heart, every pulsation of which was so keenly felt at the seat of pain. She knew from Mr. Carleton's voice and manner, she *thought* she knew, that he had exceeding good tidings for her; once assured of that she would soon be better; but she was worse now.

"Where is Mr. Carleton gone?" said Mrs. Evelyn.

"I haven't the least idea, mamma—he has ventured upon an extraordinary undertaking and has gone off to qualify himself, I suppose. I can't conceive why he didn't ask Miss Ringgan's permission to change her physician, instead of mine."

"I suppose he knew there was no doubt about that," said Edith, hitting the precise answer of Fleda's thoughts.

"And what should make him think there was any doubt about mine?" said Constance tartly.

"Oh, you know," said her sister, "you are so odd nobody can tell what you will take a fancy to."

"You are extremely liberal—in your expressions, at least, Miss Evelyn, I must say," said Constance, with a glance of no doubtful meaning. "Joe, did you let Mr. Carleton in?"—"No, ma'am."

"Well, let him in next time; and don't let in anybody else." Whereafter the party relapsed into silent expectation.

It was not many minutes before Mr. Carleton returned.

"Tell your friend, Miss Constance," he said, putting an exquisite little vinaigrette into her hand, "that I have nothing worse for her than that."

"Worse than this!" said Constance, examining it. "Mr. Carleton, I doubt exceedingly whether smelling this will afford Miss Ringgan any benefit."

"Why, Miss Constance?"

"Because it has made me sick only to look at it."

"There will be no danger for her," he said smiling.

"Won't there? Well, Fleda my dear, here, take it," said the young lady. "I hope you are differently constituted from me, for I feel a sudden pain since I saw it; but as you keep your eyes shut and so escape the sight of this lovely gold chasing, perhaps it will do you no mischief."—"It will do her all the more good for that," said Mrs. Evelyn.

The only ears that took the benefit of this speech were Edith's and Mr. Carleton's; Fleda's were deafened by the rush of feeling. She very little knew what she was holding. Mr. Carleton stood with rather significant gravity watching the effect of his prescription, while Edith beset her mother to know why the outside of the vinaigrette being of gold should make it do Fleda any more good; the disposing of which question effectually occupied Mrs. Evelyn's attention for some time.

"And pray how long is it since you took up the trade of a physician, Mr. Carleton?" said Constance.—"It is just about nine years, Miss Constance," he answered gravely.

But that little reminder, slight as it was, overcame the small remnant of Fleda's self-command; the vinaigrette fell from her hands and her face was hid in them; whatever became of pain tears must flow.

"Forgive me," said Mr. Carleton gently, bending down towards her, "speaking when I should have been silent. Miss Evelyn and Miss Constance, will you permit me to order that my patient be left in quiet?"

And he took them away to Mrs. Evelyn's quarter, and kept them all three engaged in conversation too busily to trouble Fleda with any attention, till she had had ample time to try the effect of the quiet and of the vinegar both. Then he went himself to look after her.

"Are you better?" said he, bending down and speaking low. Fleda opened her eyes and gave him—what a look of grateful feeling! She did not know the half that was in it; but he did. That she was better was a very small item.

"Ready for the coffee?" said he smiling. "Oh, no," whispered Fleda, "it don't matter about that—never mind the coffee!"

But he went back with his usual calmness to Mrs. Evelyn and begged that she would have the goodness to order a cup of rather strong coffee to be made.

"But Mr. Carleton, sir," said that lady, "I am not at all sure that it would be the best thing for Miss Ringgan. If she is better, I think it would do her far more good to go to rest and let sleep finish her cure, before taking something that will make sleep impossible."

"Did you ever hear of a physician, Mrs. Evelyn," he said smiling, "that allowed his prescriptions to be interfered with? I must beg you will do me this favour."

"I doubt very much whether it will be a favour to Miss Ringgan," said Mrs. Evelyn, "however——"

And she rang the bell and gave the desired order with a somewhat disconcerted face. But Mr. Carleton again left Fleda to herself and devoted his attention to the other ladies with so much success, though with his usual absence of effort, that good humour was served long before the coffee.

Then indeed he played the physician's part again; made the coffee himself and saw it taken, according to his own pleasure; skilfully however seeming all the while, except to Fleda, to be occupied with everything else. The group gathered round her anew; she was well enough to bear their talk by this time—by the time the coffee was drunk quite well.

"Is it quite gone?" asked Edith.—"The headache? Yes."

"You will owe your physician a great many thanks, my dear Fleda," said Mrs. Evelyn. Fleda's only answer to this, however, was by a very slight smile.

"Oh, Mr. Carleton," said Constance as he was going, "don't leave your vinaigrette—there it is on the table."

He made no motion to take it up. "Don't you know, Miss

Constance, that physicians seldom like to have anything to do with their own prescriptions ? "

" It's very suspicious of them," said Constance ; " but you must take it, Mr. Carleton, if you please, for I shouldn't like the responsibility of its being left here ; and I am afraid it would be dangerous to our peace of mind, besides."

" I shall risk that," he said laughing. " Its work is not done."

" And then, Mr. Carleton," said Mrs. Evelyn, and Fleda knew with what a look, " you know physicians are accustomed to be paid when their prescriptions are taken."

But the answer to this was only a bow, so expressive in its air of haughty coldness that any further efforts of Mrs. Evelyn's wit were chilled for some minutes after he had gone.

Fleda had not seen this. She had taken up the vinaigrette, and was thinking with acute pleasure that Mr. Carleton's manner last night and to-night had returned to all the familiar kindness of old times. Not as it had been during the rest of her stay in the city. She could be quite contented now to have him go back to England, with this pleasant remembrance left her. She sat turning over the vinaigrette, which to her fancy was covered with hieroglyphics that no one else could read ; of her uncle's affair, of Charlton's danger, of her own distress, and the kindness which had wrought its relief, more penetrating and pleasant than even the fine aromatic scent which fairly typified it. Constance's voice broke in upon her musings.

" Isn't it awkward ? " she said, as she saw Fleda handling and looking at the pretty toy, " isn't it awkward ? I shan't have a bit of rest now for fear something will happen to that. I hate to have people do such things ! "

" Fleda, my dear," said Mrs. Evelyn, " I wouldn't handle it, my love ; you may depend there is some charm in it—some mischievous hidden influence, and if you have much to do with it I am afraid you will find a gradual coldness stealing over you, and a strange forgetfulness of Queechy, and you will, perhaps, lose your desire ever to go back there any more."

The vinaigrette dropped from Fleda's fingers, but beyond a heightened colour and a little tremulous gravity about the lip, she gave no other sign of emotion.

" Mamma," said Florence laughing, " you are too bad ! "

" Mamma," said Constance, " I wonder how any tender sentiment for you can continue to exist in Fleda's breast ! By the way, Fleda, my dear, do you know that we have heard

of two escorts for you? But I only tell you because I know you'll not be fit to travel this age."

"I should not be able to travel to-morrow," said Fleda.

"They are not going to-morrow," said Mrs. Evelyn quietly.

"Who are they?"—"Excellent ones," said Mrs. Evelyn. "One of them is your old friend, Mr. Olmney."

"Mr. Olmney!" said Fleda. "What has brought him to New York?"

"Really," said Mrs. Evelyn laughing, "I do not know. What should keep him away? I was very glad to see him, for my part. Maybe he has come to take you home."

"Who is the other?" said Fleda.—"That's another old friend of yours—Mrs. Renney."

"Mrs. Renney? who is she?" said Fleda.—"Why, don't you know? Mrs. Renney—she used to live with your Aunt Lucy in some capacity—years ago, when she was in New York; housekeeper, I think; don't you remember her?"

"Perfectly now," said Fleda. "Mrs. Renney!"

"She has been housekeeper for Mrs. Schenck these several years, and she is going somewhere out West to some relation, her brother I believe, to take care of his family; and her road leads her your way."

"When do they go, Mrs. Evelyn?"—"Both the same day, and both the day after to-morrow. Mr. Olmney takes the morning train, he says, unless you would prefer some other; I told him you were very anxious to go; and Mrs. Renney goes in the afternoon. So there's a choice for you."

"Mamma," said Constance, "Fleda is not fit to go at all, either time."—"I don't think she is," said Mrs. Evelyn. "But she knows best what she likes to do."

Thoughts and resolutions came swiftly one after another into Fleda's mind and were decided upon in as quick succession. First, that she must go the day after to-morrow, at all events. Second, that it should not be with Mr. Olmney. Third, that to prevent that, she must not see him in the meantime, and therefore—yes, no help for it—must refuse to see anyone that called the next day; there was to be a party in the evening, so then she would be safe. No doubt Mr. Carleton would come, to give her a more particular account of what he had done, and she wished unspeakably to hear it; but it was not possible that she should make an exception in his favour and admit him alone. That could not be. If friends would only be simple and straightforward and kind, one could afford to be straightforward too; but as it was, she

must not do what she longed to do and they would be sure to misunderstand. There was indeed the morning of the day following left her if Mr. Olmney did not take it into his head to stay. And it might issue in her not seeing Mr. Carleton at all, to bid good-bye and thank him? He would not think her ungrateful, he knew better than that, but still——well, so much for kindness!

"What *are* you looking so grave about?" said Constance. —"Considering ways and means," Fleda said with a slight smile.

"Ways and means of what?"—"Going."

"You don't mean to go the day after to-morrow?"—"Yes."

"It's too absurd for anything! You shan't do it."—"I must indeed."

"Mamma," said Constance, "if you permit such a thing, I shall hope that memory will be a fingerboard of remorse to you, pointing to Miss Ringgan's pale cheeks."

"I shall charge it entirely upon Miss Ringgan's own fingerboard," said Mrs. Evelyn, with her complacently amused face. "Fleda, my dear, shall I request Mr. Olmney to delay his journey for a day or two, my love, till you are stronger?"

"Not at all, Mrs. Evelyn! I shall go then; if I am not ready in the morning I will take Mrs. Renney in the afternoon —I would quite as lief go with her."—"Then I will make Mr. Olmney keep to his first purpose," said Mrs. Evelyn.

Poor Fleda, though with a very sorrowful heart, kept her resolutions, and for very forlornness and weariness slept away a great part of the next day. Neither would she appear in the evening, for fear of more people than one. It was impossible to tell whether Mrs. Evelyn's love of mischief would not bring Mr. Olmney there; and the Thorns, she knew, were invited. Mr. Lewis would probably absent himself, but Fleda could not endure even the chance of seeing his mother. She wanted to know, but dared not ask, whether Mr. Carleton had been to see her. What if to-morrow morning should pass without her seeing him? Fleda pondered this uncertainty a little, and then jumped out of bed and wrote him the heartiest little note of thanks and remembrance that tears would let her write; sealed it, and carried it herself to the nearest branch of the despatch post the first thing next morning.

She took a long look that same morning at the little vinaigrette which still lay on the centre-table, wishing very much

to take it upstairs and pack it away among her things. It was meant for her she knew, and she wanted it as a very pleasant relic from the kind hands that had given it; and besides, he might think it odd if she should slight his intention. But how odd it would seem to him if he knew that the Evelyn's had half appropriated it. And appropriate it anew, in another direction, she could not. She could not without their knowledge, and they would put their own absurd construction on what was a simple matter of kindness; she could not brave it.

The morning, a long one it was, had passed away; Fleda had just finished packing her trunk, and was sitting with a faint-hearted feeling of body and mind, trying to rest before being called to her early dinner, when Florence came to tell her it was ready.

"Mr. Carleton was here a while ago," she said, "and he asked for you; but mamma said you were busy; she knew you had enough to tire you without coming downstairs to see him. He asked when you thought of going."

"What did you tell him?"—"I told him, 'Oh, you were not gone yet? it's such a plague to be bidding people good-bye —*I* always want to get rid of it. Was I right?"

Fleda said nothing, but in her heart she wondered what possible concern it could be of her friends if Mr. Carleton wanted to see her before she went away. She felt it was unkind—they did not know how unkind, for they did not understand that he was a very particular friend and an old friend—they could not tell what reason there was for her wishing to bid him good-bye. She thought she should have liked to do it very much.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was and methought I had. But man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had.—*Midsummer Night's Dream.*

MRS. EVELYN drove down to the boat with Fleda and did not leave her till she was safely put in charge of Mrs. Renney. Fleda immediately retreated to the innermost depths of the ladies' cabin, hoping to find some rest for the body at least if not forgetfulness for the mind.

The latter was not to be. Late at night the boat arrived safe at Bridgeport. Mrs. Renney and Fleda had resolved to stay on board till morning, when the former promised to take her to the house of a sister she had living in the town; as the cars would not leave the place till near eleven o'clock. The wind rose soon after they reached Bridgeport and swept furiously over the boat, rattling the tiller chains and making Fleda so nervously alive to possibilities that she got up two or three times to see if the boat were fast to her moorings. It was very dark, and only by a fortunately placed lantern she could see a piece of the dark wharf and one of the posts belonging to it, from which the lantern never budged; so at last, quieted or tired out, nature had her rights, and she slept.

It was not refreshing rest after all, and Fleda was very glad that Mrs. Renney's impatience for something comfortable made her willing to be astir as early as there was any chance of finding people up in the town. Few were abroad when they left the boat, they two. Not a foot had printed the deep layer of snow that covered the wharf. It had fallen thick during the night. Just then it was not snowing; the clouds seemed to have taken a recess, for they hung threatening yet; one uniform leaden canopy was over the whole horizon.

"I hope we'll get something to eat here," said Mrs. Renney as they stepped along over the wharf. "They ought to be ashamed to give people such a mess, when it's just as easy to have things decent. My! how it has snowed. I declare, if'd ha' known I'd ha' waited till somebody had tracked a path for us. But I guess it's just as well we didn't—you look as like a ghost as you can, Miss Fleda. You'll be better when you get some breakfast. You'd better catch on to my arm—I'll waken up the seven sleepers but what I'll have something to put life into you directly."

Fleda thanked her, but declined the proffered accommodation, and followed her companion in the narrow beaten path a few travellers had made in the street, feeling enough like a ghost, if want of flesh and blood reality were enough. It seemed a dream that she was walking through the grey light and the empty streets of the little town; everything looked and felt so wild and strange.

After breakfast she accepted the offer of her hostess to go upstairs and lie down till the cars were ready; and there got some real and much-needed refreshment of sleep and rest.

It lasted longer than she had counted upon. For the cars were not ready at eleven o'clock; the snow last night had occasioned some perplexing delays. It was not till near three o'clock that the often-despatched messenger to the depôt brought back word that they might go as soon as they pleased. It pleased Mrs. Renney to be in a great hurry, if her baggage was in the cars she said, and it would be dreadful if she and it went different ways; so Fleda and her companion hastened down to the station-house and chose their places some time before anybody else thought of coming. They had a long very tiresome waiting to go through, and room for some uneasy speculations about being belated and a night journey. But Fleda was stronger now, and bore it all with her usual patient submission. At length, by degrees the people dropped in and filled the cars, and they set off.

"How early do you suppose we shall reach Greenfield?" said Fleda.

"Why we ought to get there between nine and ten o'clock, I should think," said her companion. "I hope the snow will hold up till we get there."

Fleda thought it a hope very unlikely to be fulfilled. There were as yet no snow-flakes to be seen near by, but at a little distance the low clouds seemed already to enshroud every clump of trees and put a mist about every hill. They surely would descend more palpably soon.

It was pleasant to be moving swiftly on again towards the end of their journey, if Fleda could have rid herself of some qualms about the possible storm and the certain darkness; they might not reach Greenfield by ten o'clock; and she disliked travelling in the night at any time. She had the seat next the window, and with a very sober kind of pleasure watched the pretty landscape they were flitting by—misty as her own prospects, darkening as they? no, she would not allow that thought.

But the night fell, and Fleda at last could see nothing but the dim rail-fences they were flying by, and the reflection from some stationary lantern on the engine or one of the forward cars, that always threw a bright spot of light on the snow. Still she kept her eyes fastened out of the window; anything but the view *inboard*. They were going slowly now, and frequently stopping; for they were out of time, and some other trains were to be looked out for. Nervous work; and whenever they stopped the voices which at other times were happily drowned in the rolling of the car-wheels, rose and jarred in discords far less endurable. Fleda shut her ears to the words, but it was easy enough without words to understand the indications of coarse and disagreeable natures in whose neighbourhood she disliked to find herself; of whose neighbourhood she exceedingly disliked to be reminded. The muttered oath, the more than muttered jest, and various laughs that tell so much of head or heart emptiness, the shadowy but sure tokens of that inhuman nature which one would not realise and which one strives to forget; Fleda shrank within herself and would gladly have stopped her ears; did sometimes covertly. Oh, if home could be but reached, and she out of this atmosphere! how well she resolved that never another time, by any motive, of delicacy or otherwise, she would be tempted to trust herself in the like again without more than womanly protection. The hours rolled wearily on; they heard nothing of Greenfield yet.

They came at length to a more obstinate stop than usual. Fleda took her hands from her ears to ask what was the matter.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Renney. "I hope they won't keep us a great while waiting here."

The door swung open and the red comforter and tarpaulin hat of one of the brakemen showed itself a moment. Presently after "Can't get on," was repeated by several voices in the various tones of assertion, interrogation, and impatience. The women folks, having nobody to ask questions of, had nothing for it but to be quiet and use their ears.

"Can't get on!" said another man coming in, "there's nothing but snow out o' doors—track's all foul." A number of people instantly rushed out to see.

"Can't get on any further to-night?" asked a quiet old gentleman of the news-bringer. "Not another inch, sir; worse off than old Dobbs was in the mill-pond; we've got half way, but we can't turn and go back."

"And what are we going to do?" said an unhappy wight not quick in drawing conclusions—"I s'pose we'll all be stiff by the morning," answered the other gravely, "unless the wood holds out, which ain't likely."

How much there is in even a cheery tone of voice. Fleda was sorry when this man took his away with him. There was a most uncheering confusion of tongues for a few minutes among the people he had left, and then the car was near deserted; everybody went out to bring his own wits to bear upon the obstacles in the way of their progress. Mrs. Renney observed that she might as well warm her feet while she could, and went to the stove for the purpose.

Poor Fleda felt as if she had no heart left. She sat still in her place and leaned her head upon the back of the deserted chair before her, in utter inability to keep it up. The night journey was bad enough, but *this* was more than she had counted upon. Danger, to be sure, there might be none in standing still there all night, unless perhaps the danger of death from the cold; she had heard of such things; but to sit there till morning among all those people and obliged to hear their unloosed tongues, Fleda felt almost that she could not bear it—a most forlorn feeling, with which came anew a keen reflection upon the Evelyns for having permitted her to run even the hazard of such trouble. And in the morning if well it came, who would take care of them in all the subsequent annoyance and difficulty of getting out of the snow?

It must have taken very little time for these thoughts to run through her head, for half a minute had not flown when the vacant seat beside her was occupied and a hand softly touched one of hers which lay in her lap. Fleda started up in terror,—to have the hand taken and her eye met by Mr. Carleton.

"Mr. Carleton! Oh, sir, how glad I am to see you!" was said by eye and cheek as unmistakably as by word.

"Have you come from the clouds?"—"I might rather ask that question of you," said he smiling. "You have been invisible ever since the night when I had the honour of playing the part of your physician."

"I could not help it, sir. I was sure you would believe it. I wanted exceedingly to see you and to thank you—as well as I could; but I was obliged to leave it——"

She could hardly say so much. Her swimming eye gave him more thanks than he wanted. But she scolded herself

vigorously and after a few minutes was able to look and speak again.

"I hoped you would not think me ungrateful, sir, but in case you might, wrote to let you know that you were mistaken."

"You wrote to me?" said he. "Yes, sir, yesterday morning—at least it was put in the post yesterday morning."

"It was more unnecessary than you are aware of," he said with a smile and turning one of his deep looks away from her.

"Are we fast here for all night, Mr. Carleton?" she said presently.—"I am afraid so—I believe so—I have been out to examine and the storm is very thick."

"You need not look so about it for me," said Fleda. "I don't care for it at all now." And a long-drawn breath half told how much she had cared for it, and what a burden was gone.

"You look very little like breasting hardships," said Mr. Carleton, bending on her so exactly the look of affectionate care that she had often had from him when she was a child, that Fleda was very near overcome again.

"Oh, you know," she said, speaking by dint of great force upon herself—"you know the will is everything, and mine is very good."

But he looked extremely unconvinced and unsatisfied.

"I am so comforted to see you sitting there, sir," Fleda went on gratefully, "that I am sure I can bear patiently all the rest."

His eye turned away and she did not know what to make of his gravity. But a moment after he looked again and spoke with his usual manner.

"That business you entrusted to me," he said in a lower tone, "I believe you will have no more trouble with it."—"So I thought—so I gathered—the other night," said Fleda, her heart and her face suddenly full of many things.

"The note was given up. I saw it burned."

Fleda's two hands clasped each other mutely.

"And will he be silent?"—"I think he will choose to be so—for his own sake."

The only sake that would avail in that quarter, Fleda knew. How had Mr. Carleton ever managed it?

"And Charlton?" she said after a few minutes' tearful musing.

"I had the pleasure of Capt. Rossitur's company to breakfast, the next morning, and I am happy to report that there is no danger of any trouble arising there."

"How shall I ever thank you, sir?" said Fleda with trembling lips.

His smile was so peculiar she almost thought he was going to tell her. But just then Mrs. Renney having accomplished the desirable temperature of her feet, came back to warm her ears, and placed herself on the next seat; happily not the one behind but the one before them, where her eyes were thrown away; and the lines of Mr. Carleton's mouth came back to their usual quiet expression.

"You were in particular haste to reach home?" he asked.

Fleda said no, not in the abstract; it made no difference whether to-day or to-morrow.

"You had heard no ill news of your cousin?"—"Not at all, but it is difficult to find an opportunity of making the journey, and I thought I ought to come yesterday."

He was silent again; and the baffled seekers after ways and means who had gone out to try arguments upon the storm, began to come pouring back into the car. And bringing with them not only their loud and coarse voices with every shade of disagreeableness aggravated by ill-humour, but also an average amount of snow upon their hats and shoulders, the place was soon full of a reeking atmosphere of great coats. Fleda was trying to put up her window, but Mr. Carleton gently stopped her and began bargaining with a neighbouring fellow-traveller for the opening of his.

"Well, sir, I'll open it if you wish it," said the man civilly, "but they say we shan't have nothing to make fires with more than an hour or two longer; so maybe you'll think we can't afford to let any too much cold in."

The gentleman however persisting in his wish, and the wish being moreover backed with those arguments to which every grade of human reason is accessible, the window was opened. At first the rush of fresh air was a great relief; but it was not very long before the raw snowy atmosphere which made its way in was felt to be more dangerous, if it was more endurable, than the close pent-up one it displaced. Mr. Carleton ordered the window closed again; and Fleda's glance of meek grateful patience was enough to pay any reasonable man for his share of the suffering. *Her* share of it was another matter. Perhaps Mr. Carleton thought so, for he immediately bent himself to reward her and to avert the evil, and for that purpose brought into play every talent of manner and conversation that could beguile the time and make her forget what she was among. If success were his reward he had it.

He withdrew her attention completely from all that was around her, and without tasking it; she could not have borne that. He did not seem to task himself; but without making any exertion he held her eye and ear and guarded both from communication with things disagreeable. He knew it. There was not a change in her eye's happy interest, till in the course of the conversation Fleda happened to mention Hugh, and he noticed the saddening of the eye immediately afterwards.

"Is he ill?" said Mr. Carleton.—"I don't know," said Fleda, faltering a little, "he was not—very, but a few weeks ago——"

Her eye explained the broken sentences which there, in the neighbourhood of other ears, she dared not finish.

"He will be better after he has seen you," said Mr. Carleton gently.—"Yes——" A very sorrowful and uncertain "yes" with an "if" in the speaker's mind which she did not bring out.

"Can you sing your old song yet," said Mr. Carleton softly,—

"'Yet one thing secures us,
Whatever betide?'"

But Fleda burst into tears.

"Forgive me," he whispered earnestly, "for reminding you of that, you did not need it, and I have only troubled you."

"No, sir, you have not," said Fleda; "it did not trouble me—and Hugh knows it better than I do. I cannot bear anything to-night, I believe——"

"So you have remembered that, Mr. Carleton?" she said a minute after.

"Do you remember that?" said he, putting her old little Bible into her hand.

Fleda seized it, but she could hardly bear the throng of images that started up around it. The smooth worn cover brought so back the childish happy days when it had been her constant companion—the shadows of the Queechy of old, and Cynthia and her grandfather; and the very atmosphere of those times when she had led a light-hearted strange wild life all alone with them. She opened the book and slowly turned over the leaves where her father's hand had drawn those lines of remark and affection, round many a passage,—the very look of them she knew; but she could not see it now, for her eyes were dim and tears were dropping fast into her lap. She hoped Mr. Carleton did not see them, but she could

not help it ; she could only keep the book out of the way of being blotted. And there were other and later associations she had with it too,—how dear !—how tender!—how grateful !

Mr. Carleton was quite silent for a good while—till the tears had ceased ; then he bent towards her so as to be heard no further off.

" It has been for many years my best friend and companion," he said in a low tone. Fleda could make no answer, even by look.

" At first," he went on softly, " I had a strong association of you with it ; but the time came when I lost that entirely, and itself quite swallowed up the thought of the giver."—A quick glance and smile told how well Fleda understood, how heartily she was pleased with that. But she instantly looked away again.

" And now," said Mr. Carleton, after a pause, " for some time past, I have got the association again ; and I do not choose to have it so. I have come to the resolution to put the book back into your hands, and not receive it again, unless the giver go with the gift."

Fleda looked up, a startled look of wonder into his face, but the dark eye left no doubt of the meaning of his words ; and in unbounded confusion she turned her own and her attention, ostensibly to the book in her hand, though sight and sense were almost equally out of her power. For a few minutes poor Fleda felt as if all sensation had retreated to her finger-ends. She turned the leaves over and over, as if willing to cheat herself or her companion into the belief that she had something to think of there, while associations and images of the past were gone with a vengeance, swallowed up in a tremendous reality of the present ; and the book, which a minute ago was her father's Bible, was now—what was it ?—something of Mr. Carleton's which she must give back to him. But still she held it and looked at it—conscious of no one distinct idea but that, and a faint one besides that he might like to be repossessed of his property in some reasonable time—time like everything else was in a whirl ; the only steady thing in creation seemed to be that perfectly still and moveless figure by her side—till her trembling fingers admonished her they would not be able to hold anything much longer ; and gently and slowly, without looking, her hand put the book back towards Mr. Carleton. That both were detained together she knew but hardly felt ; the thing was that she had given it !

There was no other answer ; and there was no further need

that Mr. Carleton should make any efforts for diverting her from the scene and the circumstances where they were. Probably he knew that, for he made none. He was perfectly silent for a long time, and Fleda was deaf to any other voice that could be raised near or far. She could not even think.

Mrs. Renney was happily snoring, and most of the other people had descended into their coat collars, or figuratively speaking had lowered their blinds, by tilting over their hats in some uncomfortable position that signified sleep; and comparative quiet had blessed the place for some time; as little noticed indeed by Fleda as noise would have been. The sole thing that she clearly recognised in connection with the exterior world was that clasp in which one of her hands lay. She did not know that the car had grown quiet, and that only an occasional grunt of ill-humour, or waking-up colloquy, testified that it was the unwonted domicile of a number of human beings who were harbouring there in a disturbed state of mind. But this state of things could not last. The time came that had been threatened, when their last supply of extrinsic warmth was at an end. Despite shut windows, the darkening of the stove was presently followed by a very sensible and fast-increasing change of temperature; and this addition to their causes of discomfort roused every one of the company from his temporary lethargy. The growl of dissatisfied voices awoke again, more gruff than before; the spirit of jesting had long languished and now died outright, and in its stead came some low and deep and bitter-spoken curses. Poor Mrs. Renney shook off her somnolency and shook her shoulders, a little business shake, admonitory to herself to keep cool; and Fleda came to the consciousness that some very disagreeable chills were making their way over her.

"Are you warm enough?" said Mr. Carleton suddenly, turning to her.

"Not quite," said Fleda hesitating, "I feel the cold a little. Please don't, Mr. Carleton!" she added earnestly as she saw him preparing to throw off his cloak, "pray do not! I am not very cold; I can bear a little; I am not so tender as you think me; I do not need it, and you would feel the want very much after wearing it. I won't put it on."

But he smilingly bade her "stand up," stooping down and taking one of her hands to enforce his words, and giving her at the same time the benefit of one of those looks of good-humoured wilfulness to which his mother always yielded,

and to which Fleda yielded instantly, though with a colour considerably heightened at the slight touch of peremptoriness in the tone.

"You are not offended with me, Elfie?" he said in another manner, when she had sat down again and he was arranging the heavy folds of the cloak.

Offended! A glance answered.

"You shall have everything your own way," he whispered gently, as he stooped down to bring the cloak under her feet, "*except yourself.*"

What good care should be taken of that exception was said in the dark eye at which Fleda hardly ventured half a glance. She had much ado to command herself.

She was shielded again from all the sights and sounds within reach. She was in a maze. The comfort of the fur cloak was curiously mixed with the feeling of something else, of which that was an emblem—a surrounding of care and strength which would effectually be exerted for her protection—somewhat that Fleda had not known for many a long day—the making up of the old want. Fleda had it in her heart to cry like a baby. Such a dash of sunlight had fallen at her feet that she hardly dared look at it for fear of being dazzled; but she could not look anywhere that she did not see the reflection.

In the meantime the car full of people settled again into sullen quietude. The cold was not found propitious to quarrelling. Those who could, subsided anew into lethargy; those who could not, gathered in their outposts to make the best defence they might of the citadel. Most happily it was not an extreme night; cold enough to be very disagreeable, and even (without a fur cloak) dangerous; but not enough to put even noses and ears in immediate jeopardy. Mr. Carleton had contrived to procure a comfortable wrapper for Mrs. Renney, from a Yankee who for the sake of being "a warm man," as to his pockets, was willing to be cold otherwise for a time. The rest of the great coats and cloaks which were so alert and erect a little while ago were doubled up on every side in all sorts of despondent attitudes. A dull quiet brooded over the assembly; and Mr. Carleton walked up and down the vacant space. Once he caught an anxious glance from Fleda, and came immediately to her side,

"You need not be troubled about me," he said with a most genial smile; "I am not suffering—never was further from it in my life."—Fleda could neither answer nor look.

"There are not many hours of the night to wear out," he said. "Can't you follow your neighbour's example?"—She shook her head.

"This watching is too hard for you. You will have another headache to-morrow."—"No; perhaps not," she said with a grateful look up.

"You do not feel the cold now, Elfie?"—"Not at all—not in the least—I am perfectly comfortable—I am doing very well."

He stood still, and the changing lights and shades on Fleda's cheek grew deeper.

"Do you know where we are, Mr. Carleton?"—"Somewhere between a town the name of which I have forgotten and a place called Quarrenton, I think; and Quarrenton they tell me is but a few miles from Greenfield. Our difficulties will vanish, I hope, with the darkness."

He walked again, and Fleda mused and wondered at herself in the black fox. She did not venture another look, though her eye took in nothing very distinctly but the outlines of that figure passing up and down through the car. He walked perseveringly; and weariness at last prevailed over everything else with Fleda; she lost herself with her head leaning against the bit of wood between the windows. The rousing of the great coats, and the growing grey light roused her before her uneasy sleep had lasted an hour. The lamps were out, the car was again spotted with two long rows of window-panes, through which the light as yet came but dimly. The morning had dawned at last, and seemed to have brought with it a fresh accession of cold, for everybody was on the stir. Fleda put up her window to get a breath of fresh air and see how the day looked.

A change of weather had come with the dawn. It was not fine yet. The snowing had ceased, but the clouds hung overhead still, though not with the leaden uniformity of yesterday; they were higher and broken into many a soft grey fold, that promised to roll away from the sky by and by. The snow was deep on the ground; every visible thing lapped in a thick white covering; a still, very grave, very pretty winter landscape, but somewhat dreary in its aspect to a train full of people fixed in the midst of it out of sight of human habitation. Fleda felt that, but only in the abstract; to her it did not seem dreary; she enjoyed the wild solitary beauty of the scene very much, with many a grateful thought of what might have been. As it was, she left difficulties entirely to others.

As soon as it was light the various inmates of the strange dormitory gathered themselves up and set on foot for Quarrenton. By one of them Mr. Carleton sent an order for a sleigh, which in as short a time as possible arrived, and transported him and Fleda and Mrs. Renney, and one other ill-bestead woman, safely to the little town of Quarrenton.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Welcome the sour cup of prosperity! Affliction may one day smile again, and till then sit thee down, sorrow!—*Love's Labour Lost.*

It had been a wild night, and the morning looked scared. Perhaps it was only the particular locality, for if ever a place showed bleak and winter-stricken the little town of Quarrenton was in that condition that morning. The snow overlaid and enveloped everything, except where the wind had been at work; and the wind and the grey clouds seemed the only agencies abroad. Not a ray of sunlight to relieve the uniform sober tints, the universal grey and white, only varied where a black house-roof, partially cleared, or a blacker bare-branched tree, gave it a sharp interruption. There was not a solitary thing that bore an indication of comfortable life, unless the curls of smoke that went up from the chimneys; and Fleda was in no condition to study their physiognomy. A little square hotel, perched alone on a rising ground, looked the especial bleak and unpromising spot of the place. It bore, however, the imposing title of the Pocahontas; and there the sleigh set them down. They were ushered upstairs into a little parlour furnished in the usual style, with one or two articles a great deal too showy for the place and a general dearth as to the rest. The room was rather cold, but of that the waiter gave a reasonable explanation in the fact that the fire had not been burning long.

Furs however might be dispensed with, or Fleda thought so; and taking off her bonnet she endeavoured to rest her weary

head against the sharp-cut top of the sofa-back, which seemed contrived expressly to punish and forbid all attempts at ease-seeking. The mere change of position was still comparative ease. But the black fox had not done duty yet. Its ample folds were laid over the sofa, cushion, back, and all, so as at once to serve for pillow and mattress, and Fleda being gently placed upon it laid her face down again upon the sofa fur, which gave a very kindly welcome not more to the body than to the mind. Fleda almost smiled as she felt that. The furs were something more than a pillow for her cheek—they were the soft image of somewhat for her mind to rest on. But entirely exhausted, too much for smiles or tears, though both were near, she resigned herself as helplessly as an infant to the feeling of rest; and in five minutes was in a state of dreamy unconsciousness.

Mrs. Renney who had slept a great part of the night, courted sleep anew in the rocking-chair, till breakfast should be ready; and Mr. Carleton stood still with folded arms to read at his leisure the fair face that rested so confidingly upon the black fur of his cloak, looking so very fair in the contrast. It was the same face he had known in time past,—the same, with only an alteration that had added new graces but had taken away none of the old. Not one of the soft outlines had grown hard under Time's discipline; not a curve had lost its grace or its sweet mobility; and yet the hand of Time had been there; for on brow and lip and cheek and eyelid, there was that nameless grave composure which said touchingly that hope had long ago clasped hands with submission. And perhaps, that if hope's anchor had not been well placed, ay, even where it could not be moved, the storms of life might have beaten even hope from her ground, and made a clean sweep of desolation over all she had left. Not the storms of the last few weeks Mr. Carleton saw and understood their work in the perfectly colourless and thin cheek. But these other finer drawn characters had taken longer to write. He did not know the instrument, but he read the handwriting, and came to his own resolutions therefrom.

Yet if not untroubled she had remained unspotted by the world; that was as clear as the other. It was a strange picture that Mr. Carleton was looking at—strange for its rareness. In this very matter of simplicity, that the world will never leave those who belong to it. Half sitting and half reclining, she had given herself to rest with the abandonment and self-forgetfulness of a child; her attitude had the very

grace of a child's unconsciousness; and her face showed that even in placing herself there she had lost all thought of any other presence or any other eyes than her own; even of what her hand and cheek lay upon, and what it betokened. It meant something to Mr. Carleton too; and if Fleda could have opened her eyes she would have seen in those that were fixed upon her a happy promise for her future life. She was beyond making any such observations; and Mrs. Renney gave no interruption to his till the breakfast-bell rang.

Mr. Carleton had desired the meal to be served in a private room. But he was met with a speech in which such a confusion of arguments endeavoured to persuade him to be of another mind, that he had at last given way. It was asserted that the ladies would have their breakfast a great deal quicker and a great deal hotter with the rest of the company; and in the same breath that it would be a very great favour to the house if the gentleman would not put them to the inconvenience of setting a separate table; the reasons of which inconvenience were set forth in detail, or would have been if the gentleman would have heard them; and desirous especially of haste on Fleda's account, Mr. Carleton signified his willingness to let the house accommodate itself. Following the bell, a waiter now came to announce and conduct them to their breakfast.

Down the stairs, through sundry narrow turning passages, they went to a long low room at one corner of the house, where a table was spread for a very nondescript company, as it soon proved; many of their last night's companions having found their way thither. The two *ladies*, however, were given the chief posts at the head, as near as possible to a fiery hot stove, and served with tea and coffee from a neighbouring table by a young lady in long ringlets who were there probably for their express honour. But alas for the breakfast! They might as good have had the comfort of a private room, for there was none other to be had. Of the tea and coffee it might be said as once it was said of two bad roads—"whichever one you take you will wish you had taken the other;" the beefsteak was a problem of impracticability; and the chickens —Fleda could not help thinking that a well-to-do rooster which she saw flapping his wings in the yard, must in all probability be at that very moment endeavouring to account for a sudden breach in his social circle; and if the oysters had been some very fine ladies they could hardly have retained less recollection of their original circumstances. It was in vain to try to eat or drink; and Fleda returned to her sofa

with even an increased appetite for rest, the more that her head began to take its revenge for the trials to which it had been put the past day and night.

She had closed her eyes again in her old position. Mrs. Renney was tying her bonnet strings. Mr. Carleton was pacing up and down.—"Aren't you going to get ready, Miss Ringgan?" said the former.

"How soon will the cars be here?" exclaimed Fleda, starting up.—"Presently," said Mr. Carleton; "but," said he, coming up to her and taking her hands, "I am going to prescribe for you again? will you let me?"—Fleda's face gave small promise of opposition.

"You are not fit to travel now. You need some hours of quiet rest before we go any further."

"But when shall we get home?" said Fleda.

"In good time—not by the railroad—there is a nearer way that will take us to Queechy without going through Greenfield. I have ordered a room to be made ready for you; will you try if it be habitable?"

Fleda submitted; and indeed there was in his manner a sort of gentle determination to which few women would have opposed themselves; besides that, her head threatened to make a journey a miserable business.

"You are ill now," said Mr. Carleton. "Cannot you induce your companion to stay and attend you?"—"I don't want her," said Fleda.

Mr. Carleton however mooted the question himself with Mrs. Renney, but she represented to him, though with much deference, that the care of her property must oblige her to go where and when it went. He rang and ordered the house keeper to be sent.

Presently, after a young lady in ringlets entered the room, and first taking a somewhat leisurely survey of the company, walked to the window and stood there looking out. A dim recollection of her figure and air made Fleda query whether she were not the person sent for; but it was several minutes before it came into Mr. Carleton's head to ask if she belonged to the house.—"I do sir," was the dignified answer.

"Will you show this lady the room prepared for her. And take care that she wants nothing."

The owner of the ringlets answered not, but turning the front view of them full upon Fleda seemed to intimate that she was ready to act as her guide. She hinted, however,

that the rooms were very *airy* in winter, and that Fleda would stand a better chance of comfort where she was. But this Fleda would not listen to, and followed her adviser to the half warmed and certainly very airy apartment which had been got ready for her. It was probably more owing to something in her own appearance than to Mr. Carleton's word of admonition on the subject that her attendant was really assiduous and kind.

"Be you of this country?" she said abruptly, after her good offices as Fleda thought were ended, and she had just closed her eyes.—She opened them again and said "yes."

"Well, that ain't in the parlour, is he?" —"What?" said Fleda.

"One of our folks?"—"An American you mean? No."

"I thought he wa'n't. What is he?"—"He is English."

"Is he your brother?"—"No."

The young lady gave her a good look out of her large dark eyes, and remarking that "she thought they didn't look much alike," left the room.

The day was spent by poor Fleda between pain and stupor, each of which acted in some measure to check the other; too much exhausted for nervous pain to reach the height it sometimes did, while yet that was sufficient to prevent stupor from sinking into sleep. Beyond any power of thought, or even of fancy, with only a dreamy succession of images flitting across her mind, the hours passed she knew not how; that they did pass she knew from her handmaid in long curls who was every now and then coming in to look at her and give her fresh water; it needed no ice. Her handmaid told her that the cars were gone by; that it was near noon; then that it was past noon. There was no help for it; she could only lie still and wait; it was long past noon before she was able to move; and she was looking ill enough yet when she at last opened the door of the parlour and slowly presented herself.

Mr. Carleton was there alone, Mrs. Renney having long since accompanied her baggage. He came forward instantly and led Fleda to the sofa, with such gentle grave kindness that she could hardly bear it; her nerves had been in an unsteady state all day. A table was set and partially spread with evidently much more care than the one of the morning; and Fleda sat looking at it afraid to trust herself to look anywhere else. For years she had been taking care of others; and now there was something so strange in this feeling of being cared

for, that her heart was full. Whatever Mr. Carleton saw or suspected of this, it did not appear. On the contrary his manner and his talk on different matters was as cool, as quiet, as graceful, as if neither he nor Fleda had anything particular to think of; avoiding even an allusion to whatever might in the least distress her. Fleda thought she had a great many reasons to be grateful to him, but she never thanked him for anything more than at that moment she thanked him for the delicacy which so regarded her delicacy and put her in a few minutes completely at her ease as she could be.

The refreshments were presently brought, and Fleda was served with them in a way that went as far as possible towards making them satisfactory; but though a great improvement upon the morning they furnished still but the substitute for a meal. There was a little pause then after the horses were ordered.

"I am afraid you have wanted my former prescription to-day," said Mr. Carleton, after considering the little improved colour of Fleda's face.

"I have indeed."

"Where is it?"—Fleda hesitated, and then in a little confusion said that she supposed it was lying on Mrs. Evelyn's centre-table.

"How happens that?" said he smiling.—"Because—I could not help it, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, with no little difficulty; "I was foolish; I could not bring it away." He understood and was silent.

"Are you fit to bear a long ride in the cold?" he said compassionately a few minutes after.—"Oh, yes! It will do me good."

"You have had a miserable day, have you not?"—"My head has been pretty bad," said Fleda a little evasively.

"Well, what would you have?" said he lightly; "doesn't that make a miserable day of it?"

Fleda hesitated and coloured, and then conscious that her cheeks were answering for her, coloured so exceedingly that she was fain to put both hands up to hide what they only served the more plainly to show. No advantage was taken. Mr. Carleton said nothing; she could not see what answer might be in his face. It was only by a peculiar quietness in his tone whenever he spoke to her afterwards that Fleda knew she had been thoroughly understood. She dared not lift her eyes.

They had soon employment enough around her. A sleigh and horses better than anything else Quarrenton had been known to furnish, were carrying her rapidly towards home; the weather had perfectly cleared off, and in full brightness and fairness the sun was shining upon a brilliant world. It was cold, indeed, though the only wind was that made by their progress; but Fleda had been again unresistingly wrapped in the furs, and was for the time beyond the reach of that or any other annoyance. She sat silently and quietly enjoying; so quietly that a stranger might have questioned there being any enjoyment in the case. It was a very picturesque broken country, fresh covered with snow; and at that hour, late in the day, the lights and shadows were a constantly varying charm to the eye. Clumps of evergreen stood out in full disclosure against the white ground; the bare branches of neighbouring trees, in all their barrenness, had a wild prospective or retrospective beauty peculiar to themselves. On the wavy white surface of the meadow-land of the steep hillsides, lay every variety of shadow in blue and neutral tint; where they lay not the snow was too brilliant to be borne. And afar off, through a heaven bright and cold enough to hold the canopy over Winter's head, the ruler of the day was gently preparing to say good-by to the world. Fleda's eye seemed to be new set for all forms of beauty, and roved from one form to the other, as grave and bright as nature itself.

For a little way Mr. Carleton left her to her musings and was as silent as she. But then he gently drew her into a conversation that broke up the settled gravity of her face, and obliged her to divide her attention between nature and him, and his part of it he knew how to manage. But though eye and smile constantly answered him, he could win neither to a straightforward bearing.

They were about a mile from Queechy when Fleda suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Carleton, please stop the sleigh!"

The horses were stopped. "It is only Earl Douglass—our farmer," Fleda said in explanation—"I want to ask how they are at home." In answer to her nod of recognition Mr. Douglass came to the side of the vehicle; but till he was there, close, gave her no answer by word or sign; when there, broke forth with his accustomed guttural "How d'ye do!"

"How d'ye do, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda. "How are they all at home?"

"Well, there ain't nothin' new among 'em, as I have heerd on," said Earl diligently though stealthily at the same time

qualifying himself to make a report of Mr. Carleton.—"I guess they'll be glad to see you. *I* be."—"Thank you, Mr. Douglass. How is Hugh?"

"He ain't nothin' different from what he's been for a spell back—at least, I ain't heerd that he was. Maybe he is, but if he is I ha'n't heerd speak of it, and if was, I think I should ha' heerd speak of it. He *was* pretty bad a spell ago—about when you went away—but he's been better sen. So they say. I ha'n't seen him.—Well, Flidda," he added with somewhat of a sly gleam in his eye—"do you think you're going to make up your mind to stay to hum this time?"

"I have no immediate intention of running away, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda, her pale cheeks turning rose as she saw him looking curiously up and down the edges of the black fox. His eye came back to hers with a good-humoured intelligence that she could hardly stand.

"It's time you was back," said he. "Your uncle's to hum; but he don't do me much good, whatever he does to other folks, nor himself nother, as far as the farm goes; there's that corn——"—"Very well, Mr. Douglass," said Fleda, "I shall be at home now, and I shall see about it."

"Very good," said Earl, as he stepped back, "Queechy can't get along without you, that's no mistake." They drove on a few minutes in silence.

"Aren't you thinking, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, "that my countrymen are a strange mixture?"—"I was not thinking of them at all at this moment. I believe such a notion has crossed my mind."

"It has crossed mine very often," said Fleda.

"How do you read them? What is the basis of it?"

"I think the strong self-respect which springs from the security and importance that republican institutions give every man. But," she added, colouring, "I have seen very little of the world, and ought not to judge."

"I have no doubt you are quite right," said Mr. Carleton smiling. "But don't you think an equal degree of self-respect may consist with giving honour where honour is due?"—"Yes," said Fleda a little doubtfully, "where religion and not republicanism is the spring of it."

"Humility and not pride," said he. "Yes, you are right."

"My countrymen do yield honour where they think it is due," said Fleda; "especially where it is not claimed. They must give it to reality, not to pretension. And I confess I would rather see them a little rude in their independence

than cringing before mere advantages of external position; even for my own personal pleasure."—"I agree with you, Elfie, putting perhaps the last clause out of the question."

"Now that man," said Fleda, smiling at his look, "I suppose his address must have struck you as very strange; and yet there was no want of respect under it. I am sure he has a true thorough respect and even regard for me, and would prove it on any occasion."—"I have no doubt of that."

"But it does not satisfy you?"—"Not quite. I confess I should require more from any one under my control."

"Oh, nobody is under control here," said Fleda. "That is, I mean, individual control. Unless so far as self-interest comes in. I suppose that is all-powerful here as elsewhere."

"And the reason it gives less power to individuals is that the greater freedom of resources makes no man's interest depend so absolutely on one other man. That is a reason you cannot regret. No, your countrymen have the best of it, Elfie. But do you suppose that this is a fair sample of the whole country?"—"I dare not say that," said Fleda. "I am afraid there is not so much intelligence and cultivation everywhere. But I am sure there are many parts of the land that will bear a fair comparison with it."

"It is more than I would dare to say for my own land."

"I should think——" Fleda suddenly stopped.

"What?" said Mr. Carleton gently. "I beg your pardon, sir. I was going to say something very presumptuous."

"You cannot," he said in the same tone.

"I was going to say," said Fleda blushing, "that I should think there might be a great deal of pleasure in raising the tone of mind and character among the people, as one could who had influence over a large neighbourhood." His smile was very bright in answer.

"I have been trying that, Elfie, for the last eight years."

Fleda's eye looked now eagerly in pleasure and in curiosity for more. But he was silent.

"I was thinking a little while ago," he said, "of the time once before when I rode here with you—when you were beginning to lead me to the problem I have been trying to work out ever since. When I left you in Paris I went to revolve with myself the question—What I had to do in the world? Your little Bible was my invaluable help. I had read very little of it when I threw aside all other books; and my problem was soon solved. I saw that the life has no honour nor value which is not spent to the glory of God. I saw the end I was

made for—the happiness I was fitted for—the dignity to which even a fallen creature may rise, through his dear Redeemer and Surety."

Fleda's eyes were down now. Mr. Carleton was silent a moment watching one or two bright witnesses that fell from them.

"The next conclusion was easy—that my work was at home. I have wanted my good fairy," Mr. Carleton went on smiling. "But I hope she will be contented to carry the standard of Christianity, without that of republicanism."—"But Christianity tends directly to republicanism, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, trying to laugh.

"I know that," said he smiling, "and I am willing to know it. But the leaven of truth is one thing, and the powder train of the innovator is another."

Fleda sat thinking that she had very little in common with the layers of powder trains. She did not know the sleigh was passing Deepwater Lake, till Mr. Carleton said, "I am glad, my dear Elfie, for your sake, that we are almost at the end of your journey."—"I should think you might be glad for your own sake, Mr. Carleton."

"No, my journey is not ended——"

"Not?"—"No, it will not be ended till I get back to New York, or rather till I find myself here again. I shall make very little delay there——"

"But you will not go any farther to-night?" said Fleda, her eye this time meeting his fully.—"Yes, I must take the first train to New York. I have some reason to expect my mother by this steamer."

"Back to New York!" said Fleda. "Then taking care of me has just hindered you in your business." But even as she spoke she read the truth in his eye, and her own fell in confusion.

"My business?" said he smiling; "you know it now, Elfie. I arrived at Mrs. Evelyn's just after you had quitted it, intending to ask you to take the long-talked-of drive; and learned to my astonishment that you had left the city, and as Edith kindly informed me, under no better guardianship than that in which I found you. I was just in time to reach the boat."

"And you were in the boat the night before last?"—"Certainly."

"I should have felt a great deal easier if I had known that," said Fleda.

"So should I," said he, "but you were invisible, till I discerned you in the midst of a crowd of people before me in the car."

Fleda was silent till the sleigh stopped and Mr. Carleton had handed her out. "What's going to be done with this here trunk?" said their driver, trying a tug at one handle.

"I will send somebody down to help you with it," said Fleda. "It's too heavy for one alone." "Well, I reckon it is," said he. "I guess you didn't know that I was a cousin, did you?"

"No," said Fleda.—"I believe I be."

"Who are you?"—"I am Pierson Barnes. I live to Quarrenton for a year back. Squire Joshua Springer's your uncle, ain't he?" "Yes, my father's uncle."—"Well, he's mine too. His sister's my mother."

"I'll send somebody to help you, Mr. Barnes."

She took Mr. Carleton's arm and walked half the way up to the house without daring to look at him. "Another specimen of your countrymen," he said smiling.

There was nothing but quiet amusement in the tone, and there was not the shadow of anything else in his face. Fleda looked, and thanked him mentally, and drew breath easier. At the house door he made a pause.

"You are coming in, Mr. Carleton?"—"Not now."

"It is a long drive to Greenfield, Mr. Carleton; you must not turn away from a country house till we have shown ourselves unworthy to live in it. You will come in and let us give you something more substantial than those Quarrenton oysters. Do not say no," she said earnestly as she saw a refusal in his eye. "I know what you are thinking of, but they do not know that you have been told anything—it makes no difference."

She laid her gentle detaining hand, as irresistible in its way as most things, upon his arm, and he followed her in. Only Hugh was in the sitting-room, and he was in a great easy-chair by the fire. It struck to Fleda's heart; but there was no time but for a flash of thought. He had turned his face and saw her. Fleda meant to have controlled herself and presented Mr. Carleton properly, but Hugh started up, he saw nothing but herself, and one view of the ethereal delicacy of his face made Fleda for a moment forget everything but him. They were in each other's arms, and then still as death. Hugh was unconscious that a stranger was there, and though Fleda was very conscious that one was there who was no stranger, there was so much in both hearts, so much

of sorrow and joy, and gratitude and tenderness, on the one part and on the other, so much that even if they had been alone lips could only have said silently, that for a little while they kissed each other and wept in a passionate attempt to speak what their hearts were too full of.

Fleda at last whispered to Hugh that somebody else was there and turned to make as well as she might the introduction. But Mr. Carleton did not need it, and made his own with that singular talent which in all circumstances, wherever he chose to exert it, had absolute power. Fleda saw Hugh's countenance change, with a kind of pleased surprise, and herself stood still under the charm for a minute; then she recollected she might be dispensed with. She took up her little spaniel who was in an agony of gratulation at her feet, and went out into the kitchen.

"Well do you mean to say you are here at last?" said Barby, her grey eyes flashing pleasure as she came forward to take the half hand which owing to King's monopoly was all Fleda had to give her. "Have you come home to stay, Fleda?"—"I am tired enough to be quiet," said Fleda. "But, dear Barby, what have you got in the house? I want supper as quickly as it can be had."

"Well, you do look dreadful bad," said Barby eyeing her. "Why there ain't much particular, Fleda; nobody's had any heart to eat lately; I thought I might a'most as well save myself the fuss of getting victuals. Hugh lives like a bird, and Mis' Rossitur ain't much better, and I think all of 'em have been keeping their appetites till you came back; 'cept Philetus and me; we keep it up pretty well. Why you're come home hungry, ain't you?"—"No, not I," said Fleda, "but there's a gentleman here that came with me that must have something before he goes away again. What have you, Barby."

"Who is he?" said Barby.—"A friend that took care of me on the way—I'll tell you about it—but in the meantime, supper, Barby."

"Is he a New Yorker, that one must be curious for?"—"As curious as you like," said Fleda, "but he is not a New Yorker."

"Where *is* he from then?" said Barby, who was busily putting on the tea-kettle.—"England."

"England!" said Barby facing about. "Oh, if he's an Englishman I don't care for him, Fleda."—"But you care for me," said Fleda laughing; "and for my sake don't let our

hospitality fail to somebody who has been very kind to me, if he is an Englishman ; and he is in haste to be off."

"Well, I don't know what we're a going to give him," said Barby looking at her. "There ain't much in the pantry besides cold pork and beans that Philetus and me made our dinner on—they wouldn't have it in there, and eat nothing but some pickerel the doctor sent down—and cold fish ain't good for much."

"None of them left uncooked ? "—"Yes, there's a couple —he sent a great lot—I guess he thought there was more in the family—but two ain't enough to go round ; they're little ones."

"No, but put them down and I'll make an omelette. Just get the things ready for me, Barby, will you, while I run up to see Aunt Lucy. The hens have begun to lay ? "—"La yes—Philetus fetches in lots of eggs—he loves 'em, I reckon ; but you ain't fit this minute to do a thing but rest, Fleda."

"I'll rest afterwards. Just get the things ready for me, Barby, and an apron ; and the table—I'll be down in a minute. And Barby, grind some coffee, will you ? " But as she turned to run upstairs, her uncle stood in her way, and the supper vanished from Fleda's head. His arms were open and she was silently clasped in them, with so much feeling on both sides that thought and well nigh strength for anything else on her part was gone. His smothered words of deep blessing overcame her. Fleda could do nothing but sob in distress, till she recollected Barby. Putting her arms round his neck then she whispered to him that Mr. Carleton was in the other room and shortly explained how he came to be there, and begged her uncle would go in and see him till supper should be ready. Enforcing this request with a parting kiss on his cheek she ran off up stairs. Mr. Rossitur looked extremely moody and cloudy for a few minutes, and then went in and joined his guest. Mrs. Rossitur and her daughter could not be induced to show themselves.

Little Rolf, however, had no scruples of any kind. He presently edged himself into the room to see the stranger, whom he no sooner saw than with a joyous exclamation he bounded forward to claim an old friend.

"Why Mr. Carleton," exclaimed Mr. Rossitur in surprise, "I was not aware that this young gentleman had the honour of your acquaintance."—"But I have ! " said Rolf.

"In London, sir, I had that pleasure," said Mr. Carleton.—

"I think it was *I* had the pleasure," said Rolf, pounding one hand upon Mr. Carleton's knee.

"Where is your mother?"—"She wouldn't come down," said Rolf, "but I guess she will when she knows who is here."

And he was darting away to tell her, when Mr. Carleton, within whose arms he stood, quietly restrained him, and told him he was going away presently, but would come again and see his mother another time

"Are you going back to England, sir?"—"By and by."

"But you will come here again first?"—"Yes—if Mr. Rossitur will let me."

"Mr. Carleton knows he commands his own welcome," said that gentleman somewhat stately. "Go and tell your aunt Fleda that tea is ready, Rolf."—"She knows," said Rolf. "She was making an omelette—I guess it was for this gentleman!"

Whose name he was not clear of yet. Mr. Rossitur looked vexed, but Hugh laughed and asked if his aunt gave him leave to tell that. Rolf entered forthwith into discussion on this subject, while Mr. Carleton who had not seemed to hear it engaged Mr. Rossitur busily in another, till the omelette and Fleda came in. Rolf's mind, however, was ill at ease.

"Aunt Fleda," said he, as soon as she had fairly taken her place at the head of the table, "would you mind my telling that you made the omelette for this gentleman?"

Fleda cast a confused glance first at the person in question and then round the table, but Mr. Carleton without looking at her answered instantly—

"Don't you understand, Rolf, that the same kindness which will do a favour for a friend will keep him in ignorance of it?"

Rolf pondered a moment and then burst forth—

"Why, sir, wouldn't you like it as well for knowing she made it?"

It was hardly in human gravity to stand this. Fleda herself laughed, but Mr. Carleton, as unmoved as possible, answered him, "Certainly not!"—and Rolf was nonplussed. The supper was over. Hugh had left the room, and Mr. Rossitur had before that gone out to give directions about Mr. Carleton's horses. He and Fleda were left alone.

"I have something against you, fairy," said he lightly, taking her hand and putting it to his lips. "You shall not again do me such an honour as you have to-day. I did not

deserve it, Elfie." The last words were spoken half reproachfully. Fleda stood a moment motionless, and then by some curious revulsion of feeling put both her hands to her face and burst into tears. She struggled against them, and spoke almost immediately. "You will think me very foolish, Mr. Carleton,—I am ashamed of myself—but I have lived here so long in this way, my spirits have grown so quieted by different things, that it seems sometimes as if I could not bear anything. I am afraid——"—"Of what, my dear Elfie?"

But she did not answer, and her tears came again.

"You are weary and spent," he said gently, repossessing himself of one of her hands. "I will ask you another time what you are afraid of, and rebuke all your fears."—"I deserve nothing but rebuke now," said Fleda. But her hand knew, by the gentle and quiet clasp in which it lay, that there was no disposition to give it. "Do not speak to me for a minute," she said hastily as she heard someone coming. She went to the window and stood there looking out till Mr. Carleton came to bid her good-bye.

"Will you permit me to say to Mrs. Evelyn," he said in a low tone, "that you left a piece of your property in her house and have commissioned me to bring it you?"—"Yes," said Fleda, hesitating and looking a little confused, "but will you let me write a note instead, Mr. Carleton?"

"Certainly; but what are you thinking of, Elfie? what grave doubt is lying under your brow?" All Fleda's shadows rolled away before that clear bright eye.—"I have found by experience," she said, smiling a little, but looking down, "that whenever I tell my secret thoughts to anybody I have some reason afterwards to be sorry for it."—"You shall make me an exception to your rule, however, Elfie."

Fleda looked up, one of her looks half questioning half fearing, and then answered, a little hesitating, "I was afraid, sir, that if you went to Mrs. Evelyn's on that errand—I was afraid you would show them you were displeased."

"And what then?" said he quietly.—"Only that I wanted to spare them what always gives me a cold chill."

"Gives you!" said Mr. Carleton.—"No, sir, only by sympathy; I thought my agency would be the gentlest."

"I see I was right," she said, looking up as he did not answer, "but they don't deserve it, not half so much as you think. They talk—they don't know what. I am sure they never meant half they said—never meant to annoy me with it, I mean, and I am sure they have a true love for me; they

have shown it in a great many ways. Constance especially never showed me anything else. They have been very kind to me; and as to letting me come away as they did, I suppose they thought I was in a greater hurry to get home than I really was, and they very likely would not have minded travelling so themselves; I am so different from them that they might in many things judge me by themselves and yet judge far wrong."

Fleda was going on, but she suddenly became aware that the eye to which she was speaking had ceased to look at the Evelyns, even in imagination, and she stopped short.

"Will you trust me, after this, to see Mrs. Evelyn without the note?" said he smiling. But Fleda gave him her hand very demurely without raising her eyes again, and he went.

Barby who had come in to clear away the table took her stand at the window to watch Mr. Carleton drive off. Fleda had retreated to the fire. Barby looked in silence till the sleigh was out of sight. "Is he going back to England now?" she said, coming back to the table.—"No."

Barby gathered a pile of plates together, and then inquired, "Is he going to settle in America?"—"Why, no, Barby! What makes you ask such a thing?"

"I thought he looked as if he had dressed himself for a cold climate," said Barby drily.

Fleda sat down by Hugh's easy chair, and laid her head on his breast.

"I like your Mr. Carleton very much," Hugh whispered after a while.

"Do you?" said Fleda, a little wondering at Hugh's choice of that particular pronominal adjective.

"Very much indeed. But he has changed, Fleda."—"Yes, in some things—some great things."

"He says he is coming again," said Hugh. Fleda's heart beat. She was silent.

"I am very glad," repeated Hugh, "I like him very much. But you won't leave me, Fleda, will you?"—"Leave you?" said Fleda, looking at him.

"Yes," said Hugh smiling, and drawing her head down again; "I always thought what he came over here for. But you will stay with me while I want you, Fleda?"—"While you want me?" said Fleda again.

"Yes, it won't be long."—"What won't be long?"

"I," said Hugh quietly.—"Not long. I am very glad I

shall not leave you alone, dear Fleda—very glad! Promise me you will not leave me any more."—"Don't talk so, dear Hugh!"

"But it is true, Fleda," said Hugh gently. "I know it. I shan't be here but a little while. I am so glad you are come home, dear Fleda! You will not let anybody take you away till I am gone first?"

Fleda drew her arm close around Hugh's neck and was still —still even to his ear—for a good while. A hard battle must be fought, and she must not be weak, for his sake and for everybody's sake. Others of the family had come or were coming into the room. Hugh waited till a short breath, but freer drawn, told him he might speak. "Fleda," he whispered, "I am very happy. I only want your promise about that."

"I can't talk to you, Hugh."

"No, but promise me."—"What?"

"That you will not let anybody take you away while I want you."—"I am sure he would not ask it," said Fleda, hiding her cheeks and eyes at once in his breast.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"Do you think I shall not love a sad Pamela as well as a joyful?"
—*Sidney.*

MR. CARLETON came back without his mother; she had chosen to put off her voyage till spring. He took up his quarters at Montepoole, which, far though it was, was yet the nearest point where his notions of ease could have freedom enough.

One would have thought that saw him—those most nearly concerned almost did think—that in his daily coming to Queechy Mr. Carleton sought everybody's pleasure rather than his own. He was Fleda's most gentle and kind assistant in taking care of Hugh, soon dearly valued by the sick one, who watched for and welcomed his coming as a bright spot in the

day; and loved particularly to have Mr. Carleton's hand do anything for him, rather than almost any other. His mother's was too feeling; Fleda's Hugh often feared was weary; and his father's, though gentle to him as to an infant, yet lacked the mind's training. And though Marion was his sister in blood, Guy was his brother in better bonds. The deep blue eye that little Fleda had admired Hugh learned to love and rest on singularly.

To the rest of the family Mr. Carleton's influence was more soothing and cheering than any cause beside. To all but the head of it. Mr. Carleton perceived that his company gave pain and not pleasure to his host and for that reason was the less in the house, and made his visits to Hugh at times when Mr. Rossitur was not in the way. Fleda he took out of the house and away with him, for her good and his own.

Fleda's manner with Mr. Carleton was peculiar and characteristic. In the house, before others, she was as demure and reserved as though he had been a stranger; she never placed herself near him, nor entered into conversation with him, unless when he obliged her; but when they were alone there was a frank confidence and simplicity in her manner that most happily answered the high-bred delicacy that called it out.

One afternoon of a pleasant day in March Fleda and Hugh were sitting alone together in the sick room. Hugh was weaker than usual, but not confined to his bed; he was in his great easy chair, which had been moved upstairs for him again. Fleda had been repeating hymns.

"You are tired," Hugh said.—"No——"

"There's something about you that isn't strong," said Hugh fondly. "I wonder where is Mr. Carleton to-day. It is very pleasant, isn't it?"—"Very pleasant and warm; it is like April; the snow all went off yesterday, and the ground is dry except in spots."

"I wish he would come and give you a good walk. I have noticed how you always come back looking so much brighter after one of your walks or rides with him."—"What makes you think so, dear Hugh?" said Fleda a little troubled.

"Only my eyes," said Hugh smiling. "It does me as much good as you, Fleda."—"I *never* want to go and leave you, Hugh."—"I am very glad there is somebody to take you. I wish he would come. You want it this minute."—"I don't think I shall let him take me if he comes."

"Whither? and whom?" said another voice.—"I didn't know you were there, sir," said Fleda suddenly rising.

"I am but just here—Rolf admitted me as he passed out."

Coming in between them, and still holding the hand of one, Mr. Carleton bent down towards the other. "How is Hugh to-day?"

It was pleasant to see that meeting of eyes—the grave kindliness on the one side, the confident affection on the other. But the wasted features said as plainly as the tone of Hugh's gentle reply, that he was passing away fast.

"What shall I do for you?"—"Take Fleda out and give her a good walk. She wants it."

"I will, presently. You are weary—what shall I do to rest you?"—"Nothing—" said Hugh, closing his eyes with a very placid look—"unless you will put me in mind of something about heaven, Mr. Carleton."

"Shall I read to you?—Baxter,—or something else?"—"No, just give me something to think of while you're gone,—Mr. Carleton."

"I will give you two or three of the Bible bits on that subject; they are but hints and indications you know—rather rays of light that stream out from the place than any description of it; but you have only to follow one of these indications and see whither it will lead you. The first I recollect is that one spoken to Abraham, 'Fear not, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.'"

"Don't go any further, Mr. Carleton," said Hugh with a smile. "Fleda, do you remember?"

They sat silent, quite silent, all three, for nobody knew how long.

"You were going to walk," said Hugh without looking at them. Fleda however did not move till a word or two from Mr. Carleton had backed Hugh's request; then she went.

The air was very sweet, the footing pleasant. The first few steps of the walk were made by Fleda in silence, with eager breath and a foot that grew lighter as it trod.

"Where are you, Elfie?" suddenly interrupted Mr. Carleton.

"Where am I?"—"Yes—not at Queechy?"

"No, indeed," said Fleda laughing. "Far enough away."

"Where?"—"At Paris, at the Marché des Innocens."

"How did you get to Paris?"—"I don't know—by a bridge of associations, I suppose, resting one end on last year, and the other on the time when I was eleven years old."

"Very intelligible," said Mr. Carleton smiling.

"Do you remember that morning, Mr. Carleton, when you took Hugh and me to the Marché des Innocens?"—"Perfectly."

"I have thanked you a great many times since for getting up so early that morning."—"I think I was well paid at the time. I remember I thought I had seen one of the prettiest sights I had ever seen in Paris."

"So I thought," said Fleda. "It has been a pleasant picture in my imagination ever since." There was a curious curl in the corners of Mr. Carleton's mouth which made Fleda look an inquiry—a look so innocently wistful that his gravity gave way.

"My dear Elfie!" said he, "you are the very child you were then."

"Am I?" said Fleda, "I dare say I am, for I feel so. I have the very same feeling I used to have then, that I am a child, and you taking the care of me into your own hands."

"One half of that is true, and the other half nearly so."

"How good you always were to me!" Fleda said with a sigh.

"Not necessary to balance the debtor and creditor items on both sides," he said with a smile, "as the account bids fair to run a good while."

A silence again, during which Fleda is clearly *not* enjoying the landscape nor the fine weather.—"Elfie, what are you meditating?"

She came back from her meditations with a very frank look. "I was thinking, Mr. Carleton, of your notions about female education."

"Well?——" They had paused upon a rising ground. Fleda hesitated, and then looked up in his face.

"I am afraid you will find me wanting, and when you do, will you put me in the way of being all you wish me to be?"

Her look was ingenuous and tender, equally. He gave her no answer, except by the eye of grave intentness that fixed hers till she could meet it no longer, and her own fell. Mr. Carleton recollected himself.

"My dear Elfie," said he—and whatever the look had meant Elfie was at no loss for the tone now—"what do you consider yourself deficient in?"

Fleda spoke with a little difficulty. "I am afraid in a good many things—in general reading, and in what are called accomplishments."

"You shall read as much as you please by and by," said he, "provided you will let me read with you; and as for the other want, Elfie, it is rather a source of gratification to me." Elfie very naturally asked why?

"Because as soon as I have the power I shall immediately constitute myself your master in the arts of riding and drawing, and in any other art or acquisition you may take a fancy to, and give you lessons diligently."

"And will there be gratification in that?" said Fleda.

His answer was by a smile. But he somewhat mischievously asked her, "Will there not?" and Fleda was quiet.

CHAPTER L.

Friends, I sorrow not to leave ye;
If this life an exile be,
We who leave it do but journey
Homeward to our family.—*Spanish Ballad.*

THE first of April came. Mr. Rossitur had made up his mind not to abide at Queechy, which only held him now by the frail thread of Hugh's life. Mr. Carleton knew this, and had even taken some steps towards securing for him a situation in the West Indies. But it was unknown to Fleda; she had not heard her uncle say anything on the subject since she came home; and though aware that their stay was a doubtful matter she still thought it might be as well to have the garden in order.

One morning she was busy in dressing the strawberry beds, forking up the ground between the plants and filling the vacancies that the severe winter or some irregularities of fall dressing had made. Mr. Skillcorn was rendering a somewhat inefficient help, or perhaps amusing himself with seeing how she worked. The little old silver-grey hood was bending down over the strawberries, and the fork was going at a very energetic rate.

"Philetus!"—"Marm!"

"Will you bring me that bunch of strawberry plants that lies at the corner of the beds, in the walk? and my trowel?"—"I will!" said Mr. Skillcorn.

It was another hand, however, that brought them and laid them beside her; but Fleda, very intent upon her work, and hidden under her close hood, did not find it out. She went on busily putting in the plants as she found room for them, and just conscious, as she thought, that Philetus was still standing at her side she called upon him from time to time, or merely stretched out her hand for a fresh plant, as she had occasion for it.

"Philetus," she said at length, raising her voice a little that it might win to him round the edge of her hood without turning her face, "I wish you would get the ground ready for that other planting of potatoes; you needn't stay to help me any longer."—"Tain't me, I guess," said the voice of Philetus on the other side of her.

Fleda looked in astonishment to make sure that it really was Mr. Skillcorn proceeding along the garden path in that quarter, and turning jumped up and dropped her trowel and fork, to have her hands otherwise occupied. Mr. Skillcorn walked off leisurely towards the potato ground, singing to himself in a kind of consolatory aside,—

> "I cocked up my beaver, and who but I!
> The lace in my hat was so gallant and so gay,
> That I flourished like a king in his own coun*tray*."

"There is one of your countrymen that is an odd variety, certainly," said Mr. Carleton, looking after him with a very comic expression of eye.

"Is he not!" said Fleda. "And hardly a common one. There never was a line more mathematically straight than the course of Philetus's ideas; they never diverge, I think, to the right hand or the left, a jot from his own self-interest."—"You will be an invaluable help to me, Elfie, if you can read my English friends as closely."

"I am afraid you will not let me come as close to them," said Fleda laughing.—"Perhaps not. I shouldn't like to pay too high a premium for the knowledge. How is Hugh to-day?"—Fleda answered with a quick change of look and voice that he was much as usual.

"My mother has written me that she will be here by the Europa, which is due to-morrow. I must set off for New York this afternoon; therefore I came so early to Queechy."

Fleda was instinctively pulling off her gardening gloves, as they walked towards the house. "Aunt Miriam wants to see

you, Mr. Carleton, she begged I would ask you to come there some time——"

"With great pleasure—shall we go there now, Elfie?"

"I will be ready in five minutes."

Mrs. Rossitur was alone in the breakfast-room when they went in. Hugh she reported was asleep, and would be just ready to see Mr. Carleton by the time they got back. They stood a few minutes talking, and then Fleda went to get ready. Both pair of eyes followed her as she left the room and then met with perfect understanding.

"Will you give your child to me, Mrs. Rossitur?" said the gentleman.

"With all my heart!" exclaimed Mrs. Rossitur bursting into tears,—"even if I were left alone entirely."

Her agitation was uncontrolled for a minute, and then she said with feeling seemingly too strong to be kept in—"If I were only sure of meeting her in heaven, I could be content to be without till then!"

Fresh tears came, and came freely. Mr. Carleton said no more, till hearing some noise of opening and shutting doors above stairs Mrs. Rossitur hurriedly left the room, and Fleda came in by the other entrance.

"May I take you a little out of the way, Mr. Carleton?" she said when they had passed through the Deepwater settlement. "I have a message to carry to Mrs. Elster, a poor woman out here beyond the lake. It is not a disagreeable place."

"And what if it were?"—"I should not perhaps have asked you to go with me," said Fleda a little doubtfully.

"You may take me where you will, Elfie," he said gently. "I hope to do as much by you some day. Fleda looked up at the piece of elegance beside her, and thought what a change must have come over him if *he* would visit poor places. He was silent and grave however, and so was she till they arrived at the house they were going to.

Certainly it was not a disagreeable place. Barby's much less strong-minded sister had at least a good share of her practical nicety. The little board path to the door was clean and white still, with possibly a trifle less brilliant effect. The room and its old inhabitants were very comfortable and tidy; the patchwork counterpane as gay as ever. Mrs. Elster was alone, keeping company with a snug little wood fire, which was near as much needed in that early spring weather as it had been during the winter.

Mr. Carleton had come back from his abstraction, and stood taking half-unconscious note of these things, while Fleda was delivering her message to the old woman. Mrs. Elster listened to her implicitly with every now and then an acquiescing nod or ejaculation, but so soon as Fleda had said her say she burst out, with a voice that had never known the mufflings of delicacy and was now pitched entirely beyond its owner's ken. Looking hard at Mr. Carleton, "Fleda, is *this* the gentleman that's to be your—*husband?*" The last word elevated and brought out with emphatic distinctness of utterance.

If the demand had been whether the gentleman in question was a follower of Mahomet, it would hardly have been more impossible for Fleda to give an affirmative answer; but Mr. Carleton laughed, and bringing his face a little nearer the old crone, answered, "So she has promised, ma'am."

It was curious to see the lines of the old woman's face relax as she looked at him.—"He's—worthy of you! as far as looks goes," she said in the same key as before, apostrophising Fleda who had drawn back, but not stirring her eyes from Mr. Carleton all the time. And then she added to him with a little satisfied nod, and in a very decided tone of information, "She will make you a good wife!"

"Because she has made a good friend?" said Mr. Carleton quietly. "Will you let me be a friend too?" He had turned the old lady's thoughts into a golden channel, whence, as she was an American, they had no immediate issue in words; and Fleda and Mr. Carleton left the house without anything more. Fleda felt nervous. But Mr. Carleton's first words were as coolly and as gravely spoken as if they had just come out from a philosophical lecture; and with an immediate spring of relief she enjoyed every step of the way and every word of the conversation, which was kept up with great life, till they reached Mrs. Plumfield's door.

No one was in the sitting-room. Fleda left Mr. Carleton there and passed gently into the inner apartment, the door of which was standing ajar. But her heart absolutely leaped into her mouth, for Dr. Quackenboss and Mr. Olmney were there on either side of her aunt's bed. Fleda came forward and shook hands.

"This is quite a meeting of friends," said the doctor blandly, yet with a perceptible shading of the whilome broad sunshine of his face. "Your—a—aunt, my dear Miss Ringgan, is in a most extraordinary state of mind!"

Fleda was glad to hide her face against her aunt's and ask her how she did.

"Dr. Quackenboss thinks it extraordinary, Fleda," said the old lady with her usual cheerful sedateness, "that one who has trusted God and had constant experience of His goodness and faithfulness for forty years should not doubt Him at the end of it."

"You have no doubt of any kind, Mrs. Plumfield?" said the clergyman.—"Not the shadow of a doubt!" was the hearty, steady reply.

"You mistake, my dear madam," said Dr. Quackenboss; "pardon me, it is not that; I would be understood to say, merely, that I do not comprehend how such—a—such security, can be attained respecting what seems so—a—elevated and difficult to know."

"Only by believing," said Mrs. Plumfield with a very calm smile. "He that believeth on Him shall not be ashamed."

The doctor's mouth was stopped for once. He drew back as soon as he could and said not another word. Before anybody had broken the silence Seth came in; and after shaking hands with Fleda, startled her by asking whether that was not Mr. Carleton in the other room.

"Yes," Fleda said; "he came to see aunt Miriam."

"Ain't you well enough to see him, mother?"—"Quite, and very happy," she said.

Seth immediately went back and invited him in. Fleda dared not look up while the introductions were passing of "the Rev. Mr. Olmney," and of "Dr. Quackenboss," the former of whom Mr. Carleton took cordially by the hand, while Dr. Quackenboss conceiving that his hand must be as acceptable, made his salutations with an indescribable air at once of attempted gracefulness and ingratiation. Fleda saw the whole in the advancing line of the doctor's person, a vision of which crossed her downcast eyes. She drew back then, for Mr. Carleton came where she was standing to take her aunt's hand; Seth had absolutely stayed his way before to make the said introductions.

Mrs. Plumfield was little changed by years or disease since he had seen her. There was somewhat more of a look of bodily weakness than there used to be; but the dignified, strong-minded expression of the face was even heightened; eye and brow were more pure and unclouded in their steadfastness. She looked very earnestly at her visitor and then with evident pleasure from the manner of his look and greeting. Fleda

watched her eye softening with a gratified expression and fixed upon him as he was gently talking to her. Mr. Olmney presently came round to take leave, promising to see her another time, and passing Fleda with a frank grave pressure of the hand which gave her some pain, he and Seth and the doctor left the room.

Fleda waited with a little anxiety for what was to follow. It was with a very softened eye that aunt Miriam looked at the two who were left, clasping Fleda's hand again; and it was with a very softened voice that she next spoke.

"Do you remember our last meeting, sir?"—"I remember it well," he said.

"Fleda tells me you are a changed man since that time?"—He answered only by a slight and grave bow.

"Mr. Carleton," said the old lady, "I am a dying woman—and this child is the nearest thing in the world to me after my own, and hardly after him.—Will you pardon me—will you bear with me, if that I may die in peace, I say, sir, what else it would not become me to say? and it is for her sake."

"Speak to me freely as you would to her," he said with a look that gave her full permission.

Fleda had drawn close and hid her face in her aunt's neck. Aunt Miriam's hand moved fondly over her cheek and brow for a minute or two in silence; her eye resting there too.

"Mr. Carleton, this child is to belong to you—how will you guide her?"—"By the gentlest paths," he said with a smile.

A whispered remonstrance from Fleda to her aunt had no effect.

"Will her best interests be safe in your hands?"

"How shall I resolve you of that, Mrs. Plumfield?" he said gravely.

"Will you help her to mind her mother's prayer and keep herself unspotted from the world?"—"As I trust she will help me."

A rogue may answer questions, but an eye that has never known the shadow of double-dealing makes no doubtful discoveries of itself. Mrs. Plumfield read it and gave it her very thorough respect.

"Mr. Carleton—pardon me, sir, I do not doubt you—but I remember hearing long ago that you were rich and great in the world—it is dangerous for a Christian to be so—can she keep in your grandeur the simplicity of heart and life she has had at Queechy?"—"May I remind you of your own words, my dear madam? By the blessing of God all things are

possible. These things you speak of are not in themselves evil; if the mind be set on somewhat else, they are little beside a larger storehouse of material to work with—an increased stewardship to account for."

"She has been taking care of others all her life," said aunt Miriam tenderly; "it is time she was taken care of; and these feet are very unfit for rough paths; but I would rather she should go on struggling as she has done with difficulties and live and die in poverty, than that the lustre of her heavenly inheritance should be tarnished even a little—I would my darling!"—"But the alternative is not so," said Mr. Carleton with gentle grace, touching Fleda's hand who he saw was a good deal disturbed. "Do not make her afraid of me, Mrs. Plumfield."

"I do not believe I need," said aunt Miriam, "and I am sure I could not, but sir, you will forgive me?"—"No, madam—that is not possible."

"One cannot stand where I do," said the old lady, "without learning a little the comparative value of things; and I seek my child's good, that is my excuse. I could not be satisfied to take her testimony."—"Take mine, madam," said Mr. Carleton. "I have learned the comparative value of things too; and I will guard her highest interests as carefully as I will every other—as earnestly as you can desire."

"I thank you, sir," said the old lady gratefully. "I am sure of it. I shall leave her in good hands. I wanted this assurance. And if ever there was a tender plant that was not fitted to grow on the rough side of the world, I think this is one," said she, kissing earnestly the face that yet Fleda did not dare to lift up.

Mr. Carleton did not say what he thought. He presently took kind leave of the old lady and went into the next room, where Fleda soon rejoined him and they set off homewards. Fleda was quietly crying all the way down the hill. At the foot of the hill Mr. Carleton resolutely slackened his pace.—"I have one consolation," he said, "my dear Elfie—you will have the less to leave for me."

She put her hand with a quick motion upon his, and roused herself.

"She is a beautiful rebuke to unbelief. But she is hardly to be mourned for, Elfie."—"Oh, I was not crying for aunt Miriam," said Fleda.

"For what then?" he said gently."—"Myself."

"That needs explanation," he said in the same tone.

"Let me have it, Elfie."—"Oh, I was thinking of several things," said Fleda, not exactly wishing to give the explanation.

"Too vague," said Mr. Carleton smiling. "Trust me with a little more of your mind, Elfie." Fleda glanced up at him, half-smiling, and yet with filling eyes and then as usual, yielded to the winning power of the look that met her.

"I was thinking," she said, keeping her head carefully down, "of some of the things you and aunt Miriam were saying just now, and—how good for nothing I am."—"In what respect?" said Mr. Carleton, with praiseworthy gravity.

Fleda hesitated, and he pressed the matter no further; but more unwilling to displease him than herself she presently went on, with some difficulty; wondering what she had to say with as much care as she could. "I was thinking how gratitude—or not gratitude alone—but how one can be full of the desire to please another, a fellow-creature, and find it constantly easy to do or bear anything for that purpose; and how slowly and coldly duty has to move alone in the direction where it should be the swiftest and warmest." She knew he would take her words as simply as she said them. She was not disappointed. He was silent a minute and then said gravely, "Is this a late discovery, Elfie?"

"No—only I was realising it strongly just now."

"It is a complaint we may all make. The remedy is, not to love less what we know, but to know better that of which we are in ignorance. We will be helps and not hindrances to each other, Elfie."

"You have said that before," said Fleda still keeping her head down.

"What?"—"About my being a help to you!"

"It will not be the first time," said he smiling, "nor the second. Your little hand first held up a glass to gather the scattered rays of truth that could not warm me into a centre where they must burn."

"Very innocently," said Fleda with a little unsteady feeling of voice.

"Very innocently!" said Mr. Carleton smiling. "A veritable lens could hardly have been more unconscious of its work or more pure of design."

"I do not think that was quite so either, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda.—"It was so, my dear Elfie, and your present speech is nothing against it. This power of example is always unconsciously wielded; the medium ceases to be clear so soon as it is made anything but a medium. The

bits of truth you aimed at me wittingly would have been nothing if they had not come through that medium."

"Then apparently one's prime efforts ought to be directed to oneself."—"One's first efforts, certainly. Your silent example was the first thing that moved me."

"Silent example!" said Fleda catching her breath a little. "Mine ought to be very good, for I can never do good in any other way."—"You used to talk pretty freely to me."

"It wasn't my fault, I am certain," said Fleda half laughing. "Besides, I am sure of my ground. But in general I never can speak to people about what will do them any good."

"Yet whatever be the power of silent example there are often times when a word is of incalculable importance."

"I know it," said Fleda earnestly, "I have felt it very often, and grieved that I could not say it, even at the very moment when I knew it was wanting."

"Is that right, Elfie?"—"No," said Fleda with quick watering eyes, "it is not right at all; but it is constitutional with me. I never can talk to other people of what concerns my own thoughts and feelings."

"But this concerns other people's thoughts and feelings."

"Yes, but there is an implied revelation of my own."

"Do you expect to include me in the denomination of other people?"—"I don't know," said Fleda laughing.

"Do you wish it?"—Fleda looked down and up, and coloured, and said she didn't know. "I will teach you," he said smiling.

The rest of the day by both was given to Hugh.

CHAPTER LI.

Of what is life but a sum of love,
And death but to lose it all?
Weeds be for those that are left behind,
And not for those that fall!—*Milnes.*

"HERE's something come, Fleda," said Barby walking into the sick room one morning a few days afterwards, "a great bag of something—more than you can eat up in a fortnight—it's for Hugh."

"It's extraordinary that anybody should send *me* a great bag of anything eatable," said Hugh.

"Where did it come from?" said Fleda.—"Philetus fetched it—he found it down to Mr. Sampion's when he went with the sheep-skins."

"How do you know it is for me?" said Hugh.—"'Cause it's written on as plain as a pike staff. I guess it's a mistake though."

"Why?" said Fleda; "and what is it?"—"Oh, I don't much think 'twas meant for him," said Barby. "It's oysters."

"Oysters!"—"Yes—come out and look at 'em—you never see such fine fellows. I've heerd say," said Barby abstractedly as Fleda followed her out and she displayed to view some magnificent Ostraceans, "I've heerd say that an English shilling was worth two American ones, but I never understood it rightly till now."

To all intents and purposes those were English oysters, and worth twice as much as any others, Fleda secretly confessed. That evening, up in the sick room, it was quite evening, and all the others of the family were taking rest or keeping Mr. Rossitur company down stairs: Fleda was carefully roasting some of the same oysters for Hugh's supper. She had spread out a glowing bed of coals on the hearth, and there lay four or five of the big bivalves, snapping and spluttering in approbation of their quarters in a most comfortable manner; and Fleda standing before the fire tended them with a double kind of pleasure. From one friend, and for another, those were most odorous oysters. Hugh sat watching them and her, the same in happy simplicity that he had been at eleven years old.

"How pleasant those oysters smell," said he. "Fleda, they remind me so of the time when you and I used to roast oysters in Mrs. Renney's room for lunch—do you recollect? and sometimes in the evening when everybody was gone out, you know; and what an airing we used to have to give the dining-room afterwards. How we used to enjoy them, Fleda—you and I all alone."

"Yes," said Fleda in a tone of doubtful enjoyment. She was shielding her face with a paper and making self-sacrificing efforts to persuade a large oyster-shell to stand so on the coals as to keep the juice.

"Don't!" said Hugh; "I would rather the oysters should burn than you. Mr. Carleton wouldn't thank me for letting you do so."

"Never mind!" said Fleda arranging the oysters to her satisfaction, "he isn't here to see. Now Hugh, my dear, these are ready as soon as I am."

"I am ready," said Hugh. "How long it is since we had a roast oyster, Fleda!"—"They look good, don't they?"

A little stand was brought up between them with the bread and butter and the cups; and Fleda opened oysters and prepared tea for Hugh, with her nicest, gentlest, busiest of hands; making every bit to be twice as sweet, for her sympathising eyes and loving smile and pleasant word commenting. She shared the meal with him, but her own part was as slender as his and much less thought of. His enjoyment was what she enjoyed, though it was with a sad twinge of alloy which changed her face whenever it was where he could not see it; when turned upon him it was only bright and affectionate, and sometimes a little too tender; but Fleda was too good a nurse to let that often appear.

"Mr. Carleton did not bargain for your opening his oysters, Fleda. How kind it was of him to send them."—"Yes."

"How long will he be gone, Fleda?"—"I don't know—he didn't say."

Hugh was silent a little while she was putting away the stand and the oyster-shells. Then she came and sat down by him.—"You have burnt yourself over those things," said he sorrowfully; "you shouldn't have done it. It is not right."

"Dear Hugh," said Fleda lightly, laying her head on his shoulder, "I like to burn myself for you."

"That's just the way you have been doing all your life."

"Hush!" she said softly.

"It is true, for me and for everybody else It is time you were taken better care of, dear Fleda."—"Don't, dear Hugh!"

"I am right though," said he. "You are pale and worn now with waiting upon me and thinking of me. It is time you were gone. But I think it is well I am going too, for what should I do without you, Fleda?"

Fleda was crying now, intensely though quietly; but Hugh went on with feeling as calm as it was deep.

"I am very, very glad that you will have somebody to take care of you now that will not let you burn your fingers for him or anybody else. It makes me happy!"—"You make me very unhappy, dear Hugh."

"I don't mean it," said Hugh tenderly. "But I don't believe there is anybody else in the world that I could be so satisfied to leave you with."—Fleda made no answer to that. She sat up and tried to recover herself.

"I hope he will come back in time," said Hugh, settling himself back in the easy-chair with a weary look, and closing his eyes.

"In time for what?"—"To see me again."

"My dear Hugh! he will to be sure, I hope."—"He must make haste," said Hugh. "But I want to see him again very much, Fleda."

"For anything in particular?"—"No—only because I love him. I want to see him once more."

Hugh slumbered; and Fleda by his side wept tears of mixed feeling till she was tired. Hugh was right. But nobody else knew it, and his brother was not sent for. It was about a week after this, when one night a horse and wagon came up to the back of the house from the road, the gentleman who had been driving leading the horse. It was late, long past Mr. Skillcorn's usual hour of retiring, but some errand of business had kept him abroad and he stood there looking on. The stars gave light enough.

"Can you fasten my horse where he may stand a little while, sir, without taking him out?"—"I guess I can," replied Philetus, with reasonable confidence—"if there's a rope's end some place——"

And forthwith he went back into the house to seek it, the gentleman patiently holding his horse meanwhile till he came out.

"How is Mr. Hugh to-night?"—"Well—he ain't just so smart they say," responded Philetus, insinuating the rope's

end as awkwardly as possible among the horse's head-gear, "I believe he's dying."

Instead of going round now to the front of the house, Mr. Carleton knocked gently at the kitchen door and asked the question anew of Barby.

"He's—come in, sir, if you please," she said, opening wide the door for him to enter, "I'll tell 'em you're here."

"Do not disturb anyone for me," said he.—"I won't disturb 'em!" said Barby, in a tone a little though unconsciously significant.

Mr. Carleton neglected the chair she had placed for him, and remained standing by the mantelpiece, thinking of the scenes of his early introduction to that kitchen. It wore the same look it had done then; under Barby's rule it was precisely the same thing it had been under Cynthia's. The passing years seemed a dream, and the passing generations of men a vanity, before the old house more abiding than they. He stood thinking of the people he had seen gathered by that fireplace and the little household fairy whose childish ministrations had given such a beauty to the scene,—when a very light step crossed the painted floor and she was there again before him. She did not speak a word; she stood still a moment trying for words, and then put her hand upon Mr. Carleton's arm and gently drew him out of the room with her. The family were all gathered in the room to which she brought him. Mr. Rossitur, as soon as he saw Mr. Carleton come in, shrunk back where he could be a little shielded by the bed-post. Marion's face was hid on the foot of the bed. Mrs. Rossitur did not move. Leaving Mr. Carleton on the near side of the bed Fleda went round to the place she seemed to have occupied before, at Hugh's right hand; and they were all still, for he was in a little doze, lying with his eyes closed, and the face as gently and placidly sweet as it had been in his boyhood. Perhaps Mr. Rossitur looked at it; but no other did just then, except Mr. Carleton. His eye rested nowhere else. The breathing of an infant could not be more gentle; the face of an angel not more peaceably at rest.

Hugh suddenly opened his eyes and without seeing anyone else, said, "Father——"

Mr. Rossitur left the bed-post and came close to where Fleda was standing, and leaning forward, touched his son's head but did not speak.—"Father," said Hugh, in a voice so gentle that it seemed as if strength must be failing, "what will you do when you come to lie here?"

Mr. Rossitur put his hands to his face.

"Father, I must speak now if I never did before, once I must speak to you, what will you do when you come to lie where I do? What will you trust to?"

The person addressed was as motionless as a statue. Hugh did not move his eyes from him.

"Father, I will be a living warning and example to you, for I know that I shall live in your memory, you shall remember what I say to you, that Jesus Christ is a dear friend to those that trust in Him, and if He is not yours it will be because you will not let Him. It is He that has made my life in this world happy, only He, and I have nothing to look to but Him in the world I am going to. But what will you do in the hour of death as I am, if He isn't your friend, father?"

Mr. Rossitur knelt down and hid his face in the coverings, but he did not utter a word.

Hugh's eyes dwelt on him for a moment with unspeakable expression, and his lip trembled. He said no more; he closed his eyes; and for a time there was nothing to be heard but the sobs which could not be restrained, from all but the two gentlemen.

And then Mr. Carleton came forward and bending over him, said, "Don't you know me, dear Hugh?"

"Is it Mr. Carleton?" Hugh looked pleased, and clasped both of his hands upon Guy's, which he laid upon his breast.

"Are you going to take Fleda away?"—"By and by," said Mr. Carleton gently.

"Will you take good care of her?"—Mr. Carleton hesitated, and then said, so low that it could reach but one other person's ear—

"What hand and life can."—"I know it," said Hugh. "I am very glad you will have her. You will not let her tire herself any more."

Whatever became of Fleda's tears, she had driven them away, and leaning forward she touched her cheek to his, saying with a clearness and sweetness of voice that only intensity of feeling could have given her at the moment—

"I am not tired, dear Hugh." Hugh clasped one arm round her neck and kissed her again and again, seeming unable to say anything to her in any other way; still keeping his hold of Mr. Carleton's hand.

"I give all my part of her to you," he said at length; "Mr. Carleton, I shall see both of you in heaven!"

"I hope so," was the answer, in those very calm and

clear tones that have a singular effect in quieting emotion, while they indicate anything but the want of it.—"I am the best off of you all," Hugh said.

He lay still for a while with shut eyes. Fleda had withdrawn herself from his arms and stood at his side with a bowed head, but perfectly quiet. He still held Mr. Carleton's hand as something he did not want to part with.—"Fleda," said he, "who is that crying? Mother, come here." Mr. Carleton gave place to her. Hugh pulled her down to him till her face lay upon his, and folded both his arms around her. "Mother," he said softly, "will you meet me in heaven? say yes."

"How can I, dear Hugh?"—"You can, dear mother," said he kissing her with exceeding tenderness of expression; "my Saviour will be yours and take you there. Say you will give yourself to Christ, dear mother! sweet mother! promise me I shall see you again!"

Mrs. Rossitur's weeping it was difficult to hear. But Hugh hardly shedding a tear still kissed her, repeating, "promise me, dear mother, promise me that you will;" till Mrs. Rossitur in an agony sobbed out the word he wanted, and Hugh hid his face then in her neck.

Mr. Carleton left the room and went downstairs. He found the sitting-room desolate, untenanted and cold for hours; and he went again into the kitchen. Barby was there for some time, and then she left him alone.

He had passed a long while in thinking and walking up and down, and he was standing musing by the fire, when Fleda again came in. She came in silently to his side, and putting her arm within his laid her face upon it with a simplicity of trust and reliance that went to his heart; and she wept there for a long hour. They hardly changed their position in all that time; and her tears flowed silently though incessantly, the only tokens of sympathy on his part being such a gentle caressing smoothing of her hair or putting it from her brow as he had used when she was a child. The bearing of her hand and head upon his arm in time showed her increasingly weary. Nothing showed him so.

"Elfie! my dear Elfie," he said at last very tenderly, in the same way that he would have spoken nine years before; "Hugh gave his part of you to me, I must take care of it." Fleda tried to rouse herself immediately.

"This is poor entertainment for you, Mr. Carleton," she said, raising her head and wiping away the tears from her face,

"You are mistaken," he said gently. "You never gave me such pleasure but twice before, Elfie."

Fleda's head went down again instantly, and this time there was something almost caressing in the motion.

"Next to the happiness of having friends on earth," he said soothingly, "is the happiness of having friends in heaven. Don't weep any more to-night, my dear Elfie."—"He told me to thank you," said Fleda. But stopping short and clasping with convulsive energy the arm she held, she shed more violent tears than she had done that night before. The most gentle soothing, the most tender reproof availed at last to quiet her; and she stood clinging to his arm still, and looking down into the fire.

"I did not think it would be so soon," she said.

"It was not soon to him, Elfie"—"How little while it seems since we were children together; how little while since before that—when I was a little child here—how different!"

"No, the very same," said he, touching his lips to her forehead, "you are the very same child you were then; but it is time you were my child, for I see you would make yourself ill. No," said he, softly taking the hand Fleda raised to her face, "no more to-night; tell me how early I may see you in the morning, for, Elfie, I must leave you after breakfast." Fleda looked up inquiringly.—"My mother has brought news that determines me to return to England immediately."—"To England!"

"I have been too long from home, I am wanted there."

Fleda looked down again and did her best not to show what she felt.

"I do not know how to leave you—and now; but I must. There are disturbances among the people, and my own are infected. I *must* be there without delay."—"Political disturbances?" said Fleda.—"Somewhat of that nature, but partly local. How early may I come to you?"

"But you are not going away to-night? It is very late."—"That is nothing, my horse is here."

Fleda would have begged in vain, if Barby had not come in and added her word, to the effect that it would be a mess of work to look for lodgings at that time of night, and that she had made the west room ready for Mr. Carleton. She rejected with great sincerity any claim to the thanks with which Fleda as well as Mr. Carleton repaid her; "there wa'n't no trouble about it," she said. Mr. Carleton, however, found

his room prepared for him with all the care that Barby's utmost ideas of refinement and exactness could suggest.

It was still very early the next morning when he left it and came into the sitting-room, but he was not the first there. A still silent figure was standing by one of the windows looking out. Not crying; but that, Mr. Carleton knew from the unmistakable lines of the face, was only because tears were waiting another time; quiet now, it would not be by and by. He came and stood at the window with her.

"Do you know," he said after a little, "that Mr. Rossitur purposes to leave Queechy?"—"Does he?" said Fleda rather starting, but she added not another word, simply because she felt she could not safely.

"He has accepted, I believe, a consulship at Jamaica."

"Jamaica!" said Fleda, "I have heard him speak of the West Indies; I am not surprised; I knew it was likely he would not stay here."

How tightly her fingers that were free grasped the edge of the window-frame. Mr. Carleton saw it and softly removed them into his own keeping.

"He may go before I can be here again. But I shall leave my mother to take care of you, Elfie."

"Thank you," said Fleda gently. "You are very kind ——"

"Kind to myself," he said smiling. "I am only taking care of my own. I need not say that you will see me again as early as my duty can make it possible; but I may be detained, and your friends may be gone, Elfie, give me the right to send if I cannot come for you. Let me leave my wife in my mother's care."

Fleda looked down and coloured, and hesitated; but the expression in her face was not that of doubt.

"Am I asking too much?" he said gently.

"No sir," said Fleda,—"and—but——"

"What is in the way?" But it seemed impossible for Fleda to tell him.

"May I not know?" he said, gently putting away the hair from Fleda's face, which looked distressed. "Is it only your feeling?"—"No sir," said Fleda, "at least, not the feeling you think it is; but—I could not do it without giving great pain."—Mr. Carleton was silent.

"Not to anybody you know, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, suddenly fearing a wrong interpretation of her words, "I don't mean that; I mean somebody else; the person—the

only person you could apply to," she said covering her face in utter confusion.

"Do I understand you?" said he smiling. "Has this gentleman any reason to dislike the sight of me?"—"No sir," said Fleda, "but he thinks he has."

"That only I meant," said he. "You are quite right, my dear Elfie; I of all men ought to understand that." The subject was dropped, and in a few minutes his gentle skill had well nigh made Fleda forget what they had been talking about. Himself and his wishes seemed to be put quite out of his own view, and out of hers as far as possible; except that the very fact made Fleda recognise with unspeakable gratitude and admiration the kindness and grace that were always exerted for her pleasure. If her goodwill could have been put into the cups of coffee she poured out for him, he might have gone in the strength of them all the way to England. There was strength of another kind to be gained from her face of quiet sorrow and quiet self-command which were her very childhood's own.

"You will see me at the earliest possible moment," he said when at last taking leave. "I hope to be free in a short time; but it may not be. Elfie, if I should be detained longer than I hope—if I should not be able to return in a reasonable time—will you let my mother bring you out? If I cannot come to you, will you come to me?"

Fleda coloured a good deal, and said, scarce intelligibly, that she hoped he would be able to come. He did not press the matter. He parted from her and was leaving the room. Fleda suddenly sprang after him, before he had reached the door, and laid her hand on his arm.

"I did not answer your question, Mr. Carleton," she said, with cheeks that were dyed now, "I will do whatever you please; whatever you think best."

His thanks were most gratefully though silently spoken, and he went away.

CHAPTER LII.

Daughter, they seem to say,
Peace to thy heart!
We too, yes, daughter,
Have been as thou art.

Hope-lifted, doubt-depressed,
Seeing in part,—
Tried, troubled, tempted,—
Sustained, as thou art.—*Unknown.*

Mr. Rossitur was disposed for no further delay now in leaving Queechy. The office at Jamaica, which Mr. Carleton and Dr. Gregory had secured for him, was immediately accepted; and every arrangement pressed to hasten his going. On every account he was impatient to be out of America, and especially since his son's death. Marion was of his mind. Mrs. Rossitur had more of a home feeling, even for the place where home had not been to her as happy as it might.

They were sad weeks of bustle and weariness that followed Hugh's death; less sad perhaps for the weariness and the bustle. There was little time for musing, no time for lingering regrets.

It was a chill spring afternoon and Fleda was in her old trim, the black cloak, the white shawl over it, and the hood of grey silk. And in that trim she walked into the sitting-room. A lady was there in a travelling-dress, a stranger. Fleda's eye took in her outline and feature one moment with a kind of bewilderment, the next with perfect intelligence. If the lady had been in any doubt, Fleda's cheeks alone would have announced her identity. But she came forward without hesitation after the first moment, pulling off her hood, and stood before her visitor, blushing, in a way that perhaps Mrs. Carleton looked at as a novelty in her world. Fleda did not know how she looked at it, but she had nevertheless an instinctive feeling, even at the moment, that the lady wondered how her son should have fancied particularly anything that went about under such a hood.

Whatever Mrs. Carleton thought, her son's fancies she knew were unmanageable; and she had far too much good breeding to let her thoughts be known; unless to one of those curious spirit thermometers that can tell a variation of temperature

through every sort of medium. There might have been the slightest want of forwardness to do it, but she embraced Fleda with great cordiality. "This is for the old time, not for the new, dear Fleda," she said. "Do you remember me?" —"Perfectly! very well," said Fleda, giving Mrs. Carleton for a moment a glimpse of her eyes. "I do not easily forget."

"Your look promises me an advantage from that, which I do not deserve, but which I may as well use as another. I want all I can have, Fleda."

There was a half look at the speaker that seemed to deny the truth of that, but Fleda did not otherwise answer. She begged her visitor to sit down, and throwing off the white shawl and black cloak, took tongs in hand and began to mend the fire. Mrs. Carleton sat considering a moment the figure of the fire-maker, not much regardful of the skill she was bringing to bear upon the sticks of wood. Fleda turned from the fire to remove her visitor's bonnet and wrappings, but the former was all Mrs. Carleton would give her; she threw off shawl and tippet on the nearest chair. It was the same Mrs. Carleton of old, Fleda saw while this was doing, unaltered almost entirely.

"Are you acquainted with the commission I have been charged with?" said Mrs. Carleton.

"I suppose so, ma'am," said Fleda with a little smile.

"It is a very pleasant charge," said Mrs. Carleton softly kissing her cheek. Something in the face itself must have called forth that kiss, for this time there were no requisitions of politeness. "Do you recognise my commission, Fleda."

Fleda did not answer. Mrs. Carleton sat a few minutes thoughtfully drawing back the curls from her forehead, Mr. Carleton's very gesture, but not by any means with his fingers; and musing perhaps on the possibility of a hood's having very little to do with what it covered. "Do you know," she said, "I have felt as if I were nearer to Guy since I have seen you."

The quick smile and colour that answered this, both very bright, wrought in Mrs. Carleton an instant recollection that her son was very apt to be right in his judgments and that probably the present case might prove him so. The hand which had played with Fleda's hair was put round her waist, very affectionately, and Mrs. Carleton drew near her. "I am sure we shall love each other, Fleda," she said.

It was said like Fleda, not like Mrs. Carleton, and answered as simply. Fleda had gained her place. Her head was in Mrs. Carleton's neck, and welcomed there.

"You know now why I have come upon you at such a time. I need not ask pardon? I felt that I should be hardly discharging my commission if I did not see you till you arrived in New York. My wishes I could have made to wait, but not my trust. So I came."

"I am very glad you did!" She could fain have persuaded the lady to disregard circumstances and stay with her, at least till the next day, but Mrs. Carleton was unpersuadable. She would return immediately to Montepoole.

"And how long shall you be here now?" she said.

"A few days—it will not be more than a week."

"Do you know how soon Mr. Rossitur intends to sail for Jamaica?"—"As soon as possible—he will make his stay in New York very short—not more than a fortnight perhaps—as short as he can."

"And then, my dear Fleda, I am to have the charge of you—for a little while—am I not?"—Fleda hesitated and began to say, "Thank you," but it was finished with a burst of very hearty tears.

Mrs. Carleton knew immediately the tender spot she had touched. She put her arms about Fleda and caressed her as gently as her own mother might have done.—"Forgive me, dear Fleda—I forgot that so much that is sad to you must come before what is so much pleasure to me. Look up and tell me that you forgive me."

Fleda soon looked up, but she looked very sorrowful, and said nothing. Mrs. Carleton watched her face for a little while, really pained.

"Have you heard from Guy since he went away?" she whispered.—"No, ma'am."—"I have." And therewith she put into Fleda's hand a letter, not Mrs. Carleton's letter, as Fleda's first thought was. It had her own name and the seal was unbroken. But it moved Mrs. Carleton's wonder to see Fleda cry again, and longer than before. She did not understand it. She tried soothing, but she ventured no attempt at consoling, for she did not know what was the matter.

"You will let me go now, I know," she said smilingly, when Fleda was again recovered and standing before the fire with a face *not* so sorrowful, Mrs. Carleton saw. "But I must say something; I shall not hurt you again."—"Oh, no, you did not hurt me at all—it was not what you said."—"You will come to me, dear Fleda? I feel that I want you very much."

"Thank you—but there is my uncle Orrin, Mrs. Carleton, Dr. Gregory."

"Dr. Gregory? He is just on the eve of sailing for Europe, I thought you knew it."—"On the *eve?* so soon?"

"Very soon, he told me. Dear Fleda, shall I remind you of my commission, and who gave it to me."—Fleda hesitated still; at least she stood looking into the fire and did not answer.

"You do not own his authority yet," Mrs. Carleton went on; "but I am sure his wishes do not weigh for nothing with you, and I can plead them." Probably it was a source of some gratification to Mrs. Carleton to see those deep spots on Fleda's cheeks. They were a silent tribute to an invisible presence that flattered the lady's affection—or her pride. "What do you say, dear Fleda, to him and to me?" she said smiling and kissing her.—"I will come, Mrs. Carleton." The lady was quite satisfied and departed on the instant, having got, she said, all she wanted; and Fleda cried till her eyes were sore.

The days were few that remained to them in their old home; not more than a week, as Fleda had said. It was the first week in May. The evening before they were to leave Queechy, Fleda and Mrs. Rossitur went together to pay their farewell visit to Hugh's grave. The little country grave-yard lay alone on a hill-side, a good way from any house, and out of sight even of any but a very distant one.

Fleda and Mrs. Rossitur went softly to one spot where the grass was not grown, and where the bright white marble caught the eye and spoke of grief fresh too. Oh, that that were grey and moss-grown like the others! The mother placed herself where the staring black letters of Hugh's name could not remind her so harshly that it no more belonged to the living; and sitting down on the ground hid her face, to struggle through the parting agony once more, with added bitterness.

Fleda stood sharing it, for with her too it was the last time, in all likelihood. If she had been alone, her grief might have witnessed itself bitterly and uncontrolled; but the selfish relief was foregone for the sake of another, that it might be in her power by and by to minister to a heart yet sorer and weaker than hers. The tears that fell so quietly and so fast upon the foot of Hugh's grave were all the deeper drawn and richer fraught.

So they remained for a while, when at Fleda's touch and voice, gentle and loving as the spirit of love and gentleness could make them, Mrs. Rossitur tried to rouse herself; lifted

up her weary head and clasped her arms about her niece. The manner of it went to Fleda's heart, for there was it both a looking to her for support and a clinging to her as another dear thing she was about to lose. Fleda could not speak for the heartache.

The sun was sinking low on that fair May afternoon and they had two miles to walk to get home.

With a full heart Fleda clasped her aunt's arm, and they went gently down the lane without saying one word to each other, till they had left the graveyard far behind them and were in the high road again.

CHAPTER LIII.

"Use your pleasure: if your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter."—*Merchant of Venice.*

It was a trying week or two before Mr. Rossitur and his family were fairly on shipboard. Fleda as usual, and more than usual, with the eagerness of affection that felt its opportunities numbered and would gladly have concentrated the services of years into days, wrought, watched, and toiled, at what expense to her own flesh and blood Mrs. Rossitur never knew, and the others were too busy to guess. But Mrs. Carleton saw the signs of it, and was heartily rejoiced when they were fairly gone and Fleda was committed to her hands.

For days, almost for weeks, after her aunt was gone, Fleda could do little but rest and sleep; so great was the weariness of mind and body, and the exhaustion of the animal spirits, which had been kept upon a strain to hide her feelings and support those of others. To the very last moment affection's sweet work had been done; the eye, the voice, the smile, to say nothing of the hands, had been tasked and kept in play to put away recollections, to cheer hopes, to soften the present, to lighten the future; and hardest of all, to do the whole by her own living example. As soon as the last look and wave of the

hand were exchanged and there was no longer anybody to lean upon her for strength and support, Fleda showed how weak she was, and sank into a state of prostration as gentle and deep almost as an infant's.

As sweet and lovely as a child, too, Mrs. Carleton declared her to be; sweet and lovely as *she* was when a child; and there was no going beyond that. As neither this lady nor Fleda had changed essentially since the days of their former acquaintanceship, it followed that there was still as little in common between them, except indeed now the strong ground of affection. Whatever concerned her son concerned Mrs. Carleton in almost equal degree; anything that he valued she valued; and to have a thorough appreciation of him was a sure title to her esteem. The consequence of all this was that Fleda was now the most precious thing in the world to her after himself; especially since her eyes, sharpened as well as opened by affection, could find in her nothing that she thought unworthy of him. In her personally, country and blood, Mrs. Carleton might have wished changed; but her desire that her son should marry, the strongest wish she had known for years, had grown so despairing that her only feeling now on the subject was joy; she was not in the least inclined to quarrel with his choice. Fleda had from her the tenderest care, as well as the utmost delicacy that affection and good-breeding could teach. And Fleda needed both, for she was slow in going back to her old health and strength; and stripped on a sudden of all her old friends, on this turning-point of her life, her spirits were in that quiet mood that would have felt any jarring most keenly.

The weeks of her first languor and weariness were over, and she was beginning again to feel and look like herself. The weather was hot and the city disagreeable now, for it was the end of June; but they had pleasant rooms upon the Battery, and Fleda's windows looked out upon the waving tops of green trees and the bright waters of the bay.

She was on her couch as usual, looking out one fair morning, when Mrs. Carleton came in to kiss her and ask how she did. Fleda said better. "Better! you always say 'better,'" said Mrs. Carleton; "but I don't see that you get better very fast. And sober,—this cheek is too sober," she added, passing her hand fondly over it; "I don't like to see it so."

"That is just the way I have been feeling, ma'am—unable to rouse myself. I should be ashamed of it, if I could help it."

"Mrs. Evelyn has been here begging that we would join

her in a party to the Springs—Saratoga—how would you like that ? "

" I should like anything that you would like, ma'am," said Fleda, with a thought how she would like to read Montepoole for Saratoga.

" The city is very hot and dusty just now."

" Very, and I am sorry to keep you in it, Mrs. Carleton."

" Keep me, love ? " said Mrs. Carleton bending down her face to her again ; " it's a pleasure to be kept anywhere by you." Fleda shut her eyes, for she could hardly bear a little word now.

" I don't like to keep *you* here—it is not myself I am thinking of. I fancy a change would do you good."—" You are very kind, ma'am."

" Very interested kindness," said Mrs. Carleton. " I want to see you looking a little better before Guy comes. I am afraid he will look grave at both of us." But as she paused and stroked Fleda's cheek it came into her mind to doubt the truth of the last assertion, and she ended off with, " I wish he would come ! " So Fleda wished truly ; for now, cut off as she was from her old associations, she longed for the presence of the one friend that was to take place of them all.

" I hope we shall hear soon that there is some prospect of his getting free," Mrs. Carleton went on. " He has been gone now,—how many weeks ? I am looking for a letter to-day. And there it is ! " The maid at this moment entered with the steamer despatches. Mrs. Carleton pounced upon the one she knew and broke it open.

" Here it is ! and there is yours, Fleda." With kind politeness she went off to read her own and Fleda to study hers at her leisure. An hour after she came in again. Fleda's face was turned from her.

" Well, what does he say ? " she asked in a lively tone.

" I suppose the same he has said to you, ma'am," said Fleda.

" I don't suppose it, indeed," said Mrs. Carleton laughing. " He has given me sundry charges, which if he has given you it is morally certain we shall never come to an understanding."

" I have received no charges," said Fleda.

" I am directed to be very careful to find out your exact wish in the matter and to let you follow no other. So what is it, my sweet Fleda ? "—" I promised——" said Fleda colouring and turning her letter over. But there she stopped.

" Whom and what ? " said Mrs. Carleton after she had waited a reasonable time.—" Mr. Carleton."

"What did you promise, my dear Fleda?"—"That—I would do as he said."

"But he wishes you to do as you please." Fleda brought her eyes quick out of Mrs. Carleton's view, and was silent.

"What do you say, dear Fleda?" said the lady, taking her hand and bending over her.—"I am sure we shall be expected," said Fleda. "I will."

"You are a darling girl!" said Mrs. Carleton kissing her again and again. "I will love you for ever for that. And I am sure it will be the best thing for you—the sea will do you good, and *ne vous en déplaise*, our own home is pleasanter just now than this dusty town. I will write by this steamer and tell Guy we will be there by the next. He will have everything in readiness, I know, at all events; and in half an hour after you get there, my dear Fleda, you will be established in all your rights—as well as if it had been done six months before. Guy will know how to thank you. But after all, Fleda, you might do him this grace—considering how long he has been waiting upon you."

Something in Fleda's eyes induced Mrs. Carleton to say, laughing, "What's the matter?"—"He never waited for me," said Fleda simply.

"Didn't he? But, my dear Fleda," said Mrs. Carleton in amused extremity, "how long is it since you knew what he came out here for?"

"I don't know now, ma'am," said Fleda. But she became angelically rosy the next minute.

"He never told you?"—"No."

"And you never asked him?"—"Why no, ma'am!"

"He will be well suited in a wife," said Mrs. Carleton laughing. "But he can have no objection to your knowing now, I suppose. He never told me but at the latest. You must know, Fleda, that it has been my wish for a great many years that Guy would marry—and I almost despaired, he was so difficult to please—his taste in everything is so fastidious; but I am glad of it now," she added, kissing Fleda's cheek. "Last spring—not this last, but a year ago—one evening at home I was talking to him on this subject; but he met everything I said lightly—you know his way—and I saw my words took no hold. I asked him at last in a kind of desperation if he supposed there was a woman in the world that could please him; and he laughed, and said if there was he was afraid she was not in that hemisphere, And a day or two after he told me he was going to America."

"Did he say for what?"—"No, but I guessed as soon as I found he was prolonging his stay, and I was sure when he wrote me to come out to him. But I never knew till I landed, Fleda, my dear, any more than that. The first question I asked him was who he was going to introduce to me."

Mrs. Carleton counted the days to the steamer, and her spirits rose with each one. Fleda's spirits were quiet to the last degree, and passive, too passive, Mrs. Carleton thought. She did not know the course of the years that had gone, and could not understand how strangely Fleda seemed to herself now to stand alone, broken off from her old friends and her former life, on a little piece of time that was like an isthmus joining two continents. Fleda felt it all exceedingly; felt that she was changing from one sphere of life to another; never forgot the graves she had left at Queechy, and as little the thoughts and prayers that had sprung up beside them. She felt, with all Mrs. Carleton's kindness, that she was completely alone, with no one on her side the ocean to look to; and glad to be relieved from taking active part in anything she made her little Bible her companion for the greater part of the time.

"Are you going to carry that sober face all the way to Carleton?" said Mrs. Carleton, one day, pleasantly.—"I don't know, ma'am."

"What do you suppose Guy will think of it?"

But the thought of what he would think of it, and what he would say to it, and how fast he would brighten it, made Fleda burst into tears. Mrs. Carleton resolved to talk to her no more, but to get her home as fast as possible.

"I have one consolation," said Charlton Rossitur, as he shook hands with her on board the steamer; "I have received permission, from headquarters, to come and see you in England; and to that I shall look forward constantly from this time."

CHAPTER LIV.

"The full sum of me
Is sum of something; which to term in gross,
Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd;
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; and happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all, is that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As from her lord, her governor, her king."
—*Merchant of Venice.*

THEY had a very speedy passage to the other side, and partly in consequence of that Mr. Carleton was *not* found waiting for them in Liverpool. Mrs. Carleton would not tarry there, but hastened down at once to the country, thinking to be at home before the news of their arrival.

It was early morning of one fair day in July when they were at last drawing near the end of their journey. They would have reached it the evening before, but for a storm which had constrained them to stop and wait over the night at a small town about eight miles off. For fear then of passing Guy on the road his mother sent a servant before.

They were welcomed, at least one of them was, with every appearance of sincerity by the most respectable-looking personage who opened to them and whom Fleda remembered instantly. The array of servants in the hall would almost have startled her if she had not recollected the same thing on her first coming to Carleton. She stepped in with a curious sense of that first time, when she had come there a little child.

"Where is your master?" was Mrs. Carleton's immediate demand.—"Mr. Carleton set off this morning for Liverpool."

Mrs. Carleton gave a quick glance at Fleda, who kept her eyes at home.

"We did not meet him—we have not passed him. How long ago?" were her next rapid words.—"My master left Carleton as early as five o'clock—he gave orders to drive as fast as possible."

"Then he had gone through Hollonby an hour before we left it," said Mrs. Carleton looking again to her companion; "but he will hear of us at Carstairs—we stopped there yesterday afternoon—he will be back again in a few hours I am sure. Then we have been expected?"—"Yes ma'am—my master gave orders that you should be expected."

"Is all well, Popham?"—"All is well madam!"

"Is Lady Peterborough here?"—"His Lordship and Lady Peterborough arrived the day before yesterday," was the succinct reply.

Drawing Fleda's arm within hers and giving kind recognition to the rest who stood around, Mrs. Carleton led her to the stairs and mounted them, repeating in a whisper, "He will be here presently again." They went to Mrs. Carleton's dressing room, Fleda wondering in an internal fever whether "orders had been given" to expect her also? From the old butler's benign look at her as he said "All is well!" she could not help thinking it. If she maintained her outward quiet it was the merest external crust of seeming—there was nothing like quiet beneath it; and Mrs. Carleton's kiss and fond words of welcome were hardly composing.

Mrs. Carleton made her sit down, and with very gentle hands was busy arranging her hair, when the housekeeper came in, to pay her more particular respects and to offer her services. Fleda hardly ventured a glance to see whether *she* looked benign. She was a dignified elderly person, as stately and near as handsome as Mrs. Carleton herself.

"My dear Fleda," said the latter when she had finished the hair, "I am going to see my sister—will you let Mrs. Fothergill help you in anything you want, and take you then to the library—you will find no one, and I will come to you there. Mrs. Fothergill, I recommend you to the particular care of this lady."

The recommendation was not needed, Fleda thought, or was very effectual; the housekeeper served her with most assiduous care, and in absolute silence. Fleda hurried the finishing of her toilet.

"Are the people quiet in the country?" she forced herself to say.—"Perfectly quiet, ma'am. It needed only that my master should be at home to make them so."

"How is that?"—"He has their love and their ear, ma'am, and so it is that he can just do his pleasure with them."

"How is it in the neighbouring country?"—"They're quiet ma'am, I believe,—mostly—there's been some little disturbance in one place and another, and more fear of it, as well as I can make out, but it's well got over, as it appears. The noblemen and gentlemen in the country around were very glad all of them I am told, of Mr. Carleton's return. Is there nothing more I can do for you, ma'am?"

The last question was put with an indefinable touch of

kindliness which had not softened the respect of her first words. Fleda begged her to show the way to the library, which Mrs. Fothergill immediately did, remarking as she ushered her in that "those were Mr. Carleton's favourite rooms."

Fleda did not need to be told that; she put the remark and the benignity together, and drew a nervous indifference. But Mrs. Fothergill was gone and she was alone. Nobody was there, as Mrs. Carleton had said.

Fleda stood still in the middle of the floor, looking around her, in a bewildered effort to realise the past and the present; with all the mind in the world to cry, but there was too great a pressure of excitement and too much strangeness of feeling at work.

So lost was she in thought, that she started fearfully on suddenly becoming aware that a figure had come just beside her.

It was an elderly and most gentlemanly-looking man, as a glance made her know. Fleda was reassured and ashamed in a breath. The gentleman did not notice her confusion however, otherwise than by a very pleasant and well-bred smile, and immediately entered into some light remarks on the morning, the place, and the improvements Mr. Carleton had made in the latter. Though he said the place was one of those which could bear very well to want improvement; but Carleton was always finding something to do which excited his admiration.

"Landscape gardening is one of the pleasantest of amusements," said Fleda.

"I have just knowledge enough in the matter to admire; to originate any ideas is beyond me; I have to depend for them upon my gardener and my wife, and so I lose a pleasure, I suppose; but every man has his own particular hobby. Carleton, however, has more than his share—he has half-a-dozen, I think."—"Half-a-dozen hobbies!" said Fleda.

"Perhaps I should not call them hobbies, for he manages to ride them all skilfully; and a hobby-horse, I believe, always runs away with a man?"

Fleda could hardly return his smile. She thought people were possessed with an unhappy choice of subjects in talking to her that morning. But fancying that she had very ill kept up her part in the conversation and must have looked like a simpleton, she forced herself to break the silence which followed the last remark, and asked the same question she had asked Mrs. Fothergill—if the country was quiet?

"Outwardly quiet," he said; "oh yes, there is no more

difficulty, that is, none which cannot easily be handled. There was some danger a few months ago, but it is blown over; all was quiet on Carleton's estates so soon as he was at home, and that of course had great influence on the neighbourhood. No, there is nothing to be apprehended. He has the hearts of his people completely, and one who has their hearts can do what he pleases with their heads, you know. Well he deserves it—he has done a great deal for them." Fleda was afraid to ask in what way, but perhaps he read the question in her eyes.

"That's one of his hobbies—ameliorating the condition of the poorer classes on his estates. He has given himself to it for some years back; he has accomplished a great deal for them—a vast deal indeed! He has changed the face of things, mentally and morally, in several places, with his adult schools, and agricultural systems, and I know not what; but the most powerful means I think after all has been the weight of his personal influence, by which he can introduce and carry through any measure; neither ignorance, nor prejudice, nor obstinacy seem to make head against him. It requires a peculiar combination of qualities, I think, very peculiar and rare, to deal successfully with the mind of the masses."

"I should think so indeed," said Fleda.

"He has it—I don't comprehend it—and I have not studied his machinery enough to understand that; but I have seen the effects. Never should have thought he was the kind of man either, but there it is, I don't comprehend him. There is only one fault to be found with him though."—"What is that?" said Fleda smiling.

"He has built a fine dissenting chapel down here towards Hollonby," he said gravely, looking her in the face, "and what is yet worse, his uncle tells me, he goes there half the time himself!" Fleda could not help laughing, nor colouring, at his manner.—"I thought it was always considered a meritorious action to build a church," she said.

"Indubitably. But you see this was a chapel." The laugh and the colour both grew more unequivocal. Fleda could not help it.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I have not learned such nice distinctions. Perhaps a chapel was wanted just in that place."—"That is presumable. But *he* might be wanted somewhere else. However," said the gentleman with a good-humoured smile, "his uncle forgives him; and if his mother cannot influence him, I am afraid nobody else will. There is no help

for it. And I should be very sorry to stand ill with him. I have given you the dark side of his character."

"What is the other side in the contrast?" said Fleda, wondering at herself for her daring.—"It is not for me to say," he answered with a slight shrug of the shoulders and an amused glance at her; "I suppose it depends upon people's vision, but if you will permit me, I will instance a bright spot that was shown to me the other day, that I confess, when I look at it, dazzles my eyes a little."

Fleda only bowed; she dared not speak again.

"There was a poor fellow, the son of one of Mr. Carleton's old tenants at Enchapel, who was under sentence of death, lying in prison at Carstairs. The father, I am told, is an excellent man and a good tenant; the son had been a miserable scapegrace, and now for some crime—I forget what—had at last been brought to justice. The evidence against him was perfect, and the offence was not trifling; there was not the most remote chance of a pardon, but it seemed the poor wretch had been building up his dependence upon that hope and was resting on it; and consequently was altogether indisposed and unfit to give his attention to the subjects that his situation rendered proper for him. The gentleman who gave me this story was requested by a brother clergyman to go with him to visit the prisoner. They found him quite stupid, unmovable by all that could be urged, or rather perhaps the style of the address, as it was described to me, was fitted to confound and bewilder the man rather than enlighten him. In the midst of all this Mr. Carleton came in—he was just then on the wing for America, and he had heard of the poor creature's condition in a visit to his father. He came, my informant said, like a being of a different planet. He took the man's hand, he was chained foot and wrist. 'My poor friend,' he said, 'I have been thinking of you here, shut out from the light of the sun, and I thought you might like to see the face of a friend;' with that singular charm of manner which he knows how to adapt to everybody and every occasion. The man was melted at once—at his feet, as it were—he could do anything with him. Carleton began then, quietly, to set before him the links in the chain of evidence which had condemned him—one by one—in such a way as to prove to him, by degrees but irresistibly, that he had no hope in this world. The man was perfectly subdued, sat listening and looking into those powerful eyes that perhaps you know, taking in all his words and completely in his hand. And then Carleton went

on to bring before him the consideration that he thought should affect him in such a case, in a way that this gentleman said was indescribably effective and winning; till that hardened creature was broken down,—sobbing like a child,—actually sobbing!"

Fleda did her best, but she was obliged to hide her face in her hands, let what would be thought of her.

"It was the finest exhibition of eloquence, this gentleman said, he had ever listened to. For me it was an exhibition of another kind. I would have believed such an account of few men, but of all the men I know I would least have believed it of Guy Carleton a few years ago; even now I can hardly believe it. But it is a thing that would do honour to any man."

Fleda felt that the tears were making their way between her fingers, but she could not help it, and she presently knew that her companion had gone and she was left alone again. Who was this gentleman? and how much did he know about her? More than that she was a stranger, Fleda was sure; and dreading his return, or that somebody else might come and find her with the tokens of tears upon her face, she stepped out upon the greensward and made for the flaunting sweet-briar that seemed to beckon her to visit its relations.

Whilst deep in thought she was startled by the appearance of Mr. Carleton, whose greeting was as grave and gentle as if she had been a stray child.

"Do not fancy I am going to thank you for the grace you have shown me," said he lightly. "I know you would never have done it if circumstances had not been hard pleaders in my cause. I will thank you presently when you have answered one or two questions for me."

"Questions?" said Fleda, looking up. But she blushed the next instant at her own simplicity.

He was leading her back on the path she had come. No further however than to the first opening, where the climbing dog-rose hung over the way. Then he turned aside, crossing the little plot of greensward, and they ascended some steps cut in the rock to the pavilion Fleda had looked at from a distance.

It stood high enough to command the same sea-view. On that side it was entirely open, and of very light construction on the others. Several people were there; Fleda could hardly tell how many; and when Lord Peterborough was presented to her she did not find out that he was her morning's acquaintance. Her eye only took in besides that there were one or two

ladies, and a clergyman in the dress of the Church of England; she could not distinguish. Yet she stood beside Mr. Carleton with all her usual quiet dignity, though her eye did not leave the ground and her words were in no higher key than was necessary, and though she could hardly bear the unchanged easy tone of his.

Mr. Carleton then dismissing his guests to the house, went with Fleda again the other way. He had felt the extreme trembling of the hand which he took, and would not go in till it was quieted. He lead her back to the very rose-bush where he had found her, and in his own way, presently brought her spirit home from its trembling and made it rest; and then suffered her to stand a few minutes quite silent, looking out again over the fair rich spread of country that lay between them and the sea.

"Now tell me, Elfie," said he softly, drawing back with the same old caressing and tranquillizing touch the hair that hung over her brow, "what you were thinking about when I found you here?—in the very luxury of seclusion--behind a rose-bush."

Fleda looked a quick look, smiled, and hesitated, and then said it was rather a confusion of thoughts.

"It will be a confusion no longer when you have disentangled them for me."—"I don't know," said Fleda. And she was silent, but so was he, quietly waiting for her to go on.

"Perhaps you will wonder at me, Mr. Carleton," she said, hesitating and colouring.—"Perhaps," he said smiling; "but if I do I will not keep you in ignorance, Elfie."

"I was almost bewildered, in the first place, with beauty, and then——"

"Do you like the rose garden?"—"Like it! I cannot speak of it!"

"I don't want you to speak of it," said he smiling at her. "What followed upon liking it, Elfie?"—"I was thinking," said Fleda, looking resolutely away from him, "in the midst of all this, that it is not these things which make people happy."

"There is no question of that," he replied. "I have realised it thoroughly for a few months past."

"No, but seriously I mean," said Fleda pleadingly.

"And seriously you are quite right, dear Elfie. What then?"

"I was thinking," said Fleda speaking with some difficulty,

"of Hugh's grave, and of the comparative value of things; and afraid, I believe, especially here——"

"Of making a wrong estimate?"

"Yes, and of not doing and being just what I ought."

Mr. Carleton was silent for a minute, considering the brow from which his fingers drew off the light screen. "Will you trust me to watch over and tell you?"

Fleda did not trust her voice to tell him, but her eyes did it.

"As to the estimate—the remedy is to 'keep ourselves in the love of God'; and then these things are the gifts of our Father's hand and will never be put in competition with Him. And they are never so sweet as when taken so."

"Oh, I know that!"

"This is a danger I share with you. We will watch over each other." Fleda was silent with filling eyes.

"We do not seek our happiness in these things," he said tenderly. "I never found it in them. For years, whatever others may have judged, I have felt myself a poor man; because I had not in the world a friend in whom I could have entire sympathy. And if I am rich now, it is not in any treasure that I look to enjoy in this world alone."

"Oh do not, Mr. Carleton!" exclaimed Fleda, bowing her head in distress, and giving his hand an earnest entreaty.

"What shall I not do?" said he half laughing and half gently, bringing her face near enough for his lips to try another kind of eloquence. "You shall not do this, Elfie, for any so light occasion. Was this the whole burden of those grave thoughts?"

"Not quite—entirely," she said stammering. "But grave thoughts are not always unhappy."

"Not always. I want to know what gave yours a tinge of that colour this morning."

"It was hardly that. You know what Foster says about 'power to its very last particle being duty.' I believe it frightened me a little."

"If you feel that as strongly as I do, Elfie, it will act as a strong corrective to the danger of false estimates."

"I do feel it," said Fleda. "One of my fears was that I should not feel it enough."

"One of my cares will be that you do not act upon it too fiercely," said he smiling. "The power being limited so is the duty. But you shall have power enough, Elfie, and work enough. I have precisely what I have needed,—my good sprite back again."—"With a slight difference."

"What difference?"—"She is to act under direction now."

"Not at all, only under safe control," he said laughing.—"I am very glad of the difference, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda, with a grave and grateful remembrance of it.

"If you think the sprite's old office is gone, you are mistaken," said he. "What were your other fears?—one was that you should not feel enough your responsibility, and the other that you might forget it."

"I don't know that there were any other particular fears," said Fleda;—"I had been thinking of all these things——"

"And what else?"

Her colour and her silence begged him not to ask. He said no more, and let her stand still again looking off through the roses, while her mind more quietly and lightly went over the same train of thoughts that had moved it before, gradually calmed, came back from being a stranger to being at home—at least in one presence—and ended, her action even before her look told him where, as her other hand unconsciously was joined to the one already on his arm. A mute expression of feeling the full import of which he read, even before her eye coming back from its musings was raised to him, perhaps unconsciously too, with all the mind in it; its timidity was not more apparent than its simplicity of clinging affection and dependence. Mr. Carleton's answer was in three words, but in the tone and manner that accompanied them there was a response to every part of her appeal; so perfect that Fleda was confused at her own frankness.

They began to move towards the house, but Fleda was in a maze again and could hardly realise anything. "His wife"!—was she that?—had so marvellous a change really been wrought in her?—the little asparagus-cutter of Queechy transformed into the mistress of all this domain, and of the stately mansion of which they caught glimpses now and then, as they drew near it by another approach into which Mr. Carleton had diverged. And his wife!—that was the hardest to realise of all.

She was as far from realising it when she got into the house. They entered now at once into the breakfast-room where the same party were gathered whom she had met once before that morning. Mr. Carleton the elder, and Lord Peterborough and Lady Peterborough, she had met without seeing. But Fleda could look at them now; and if her colour came and went as frankly as when she was a child, she could speak to them and

meet their advances with the same free and sweet self-possession as then ; the rare dignity of a little wood-flower, that is moved by a breath, but recovers as easily and instantly its quiet standing. There were one or two who looked a little curiously at first to see whether this new member of the family were worthy of her place and would fill it to satisfy them. Not Mr. Carleton ; he never sought to ascertain the value of anything that belonged to him by a popular vote ; and his own judgment always stood carelessly alone. But Mrs. Carleton was less sure of her own ground or of others. For five minutes she noted Fleda's motions and words, her blushes and smiles, as she stood talking to one and another !—for five minutes, and then with a little smile at her sister Mrs. Carleton moved off to the breakfast-table, well pleased that Lady Peterborough was too engaged to answer her. Fleda had won them all. Mr. Carleton's intervening shield of grace and kindness was only needed here against the too much attention or attraction that might distress her. He was again, now they were in presence of others, exactly what he had been to her when she was a child, the same cool and efficient friend and protector. Nobody in the room showed less thought of her, *except* in action ; a great many little things done for her pleasure or comfort, so quietly that nobody knew it but one person and she hardly noticed it at the time. All could not have the same tact.

There was an uninterrupted easy flow of talk at the table, which Fleda heard just enough to join in where it was necessary ; the rest of the time she sat in a kind of abstraction, dipping enormous strawberries one by one into white sugar, with a curious want of recognition between them and the ends of her fingers. It never occurred to her that they had picked baskets full.

" I have done something for which you will hardly thank me, Mr. Carleton," said Lord Peterborough. " I have driven this lady to tears within the first hour of her being in the house."

" If she will forgive you, I will, my lord," Mr. Carleton answered carelessly.

" I will confess myself, though," continued his lordship looking at the face that was so intent over the strawberries, I was under the impression when I first saw a figure in the window that it was Lady Peterborough. I own as soon as I found it was a stranger I had my suspicions—which did not lack confirmation in the course of the interview—I trust I am forgiven the means I used."

"It seems you had your curiosity too, my lord," said Mr. Carleton the uncle.

"Which ought in all justice to have lacked gratification," said Lady Peterborough. "I hope Fleda will not be too ready to forgive you."

"I expect forgiveness nevertheless," said he, looking at Fleda. "Must I wait for it?"—"I am much obliged to you, sir."

And then she gave him a very frank smile and blush, as she added, "I beg your pardon, you know my tongue is American."

"I don't like that," said his lordship gravely.—"'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,'" said the elder Carleton. "The heart being English we may hope the tongue will become so too."

"I will not assure you of that, sir," Fleda said laughingly, though her cheeks showed the conversation was not carried on without effort. Oddly enough nobody saw it with any dissatisfaction.—"Of what, madam?" said Lord Peterborough.

"That I will not always keep a rag of the stars and stripes flying somewhere." But that little speech had almost been too much for her equanimity.

"Like Queen Elizabeth who retained the crucifix when she gave up the profession of Popery."—"Very unlike indeed!" said Fleda, endeavouring to understand what Mr. Carleton was saying to her about wood strawberries and hautbois.

"Will you allow that, Carleton?"—"What, my lord?"

"A rival banner to float alongside of St. George's?"

"The flags are friendly, my lord."

"Hum, just now, they may seem so. Has your little standard-bearer anything of a rebellious disposition?"—"Not against any lawful authority, I hope," said Fleda.

"Then there is hope for you, Mr. Carleton, that you will be able to prevent the introduction of mischievous doctrines.

"For shame, Lord Peterborough!" said his wife; "what atrocious suppositions you are making. I am blushing, I am sure, for your want of discernment.

"Why, yes," said his lordship, looking at another face whose blushes were more unequivocal, "it may seem so; there is no appearance of anything untoward, but she is a woman after all. I will try her. Mrs. Carleton, don't you think with my Lady Peterborough that in the present nineteenth century

women ought to stand more on that independent footing from which lordly monopoly has excluded them ? "

The first name Fleda thought belonged to another person, and her downcast eyelids prevented her seeing to whom it was addressed. It was no matter, for any answer was anticipated.

" The boast of independence is not engrossed by the boldest footing, my lord."

" She has never considered the subject," said Lady Peterborough.

" It's no matter," said his lordship. " I must respectfully beg an answer to my question."

The silence made Fleda look up.

" Don't you think that the rights of the weak ought to be on a perfect equality with those of the strong ? "

" The rights of the weak *as such*—yes, my lord."

The gentlemen smiled ; the ladies looked rather puzzled.

" I have no more to say, Mr. Carleton," said his lordship, " but that we must make an Englishwoman of her ! "

" I am afraid she will never be a perfect cure," said Mr. Carleton smiling.

" I conceive it might require peculiar qualities in the physician, but I do not despair. I was telling her of some of your doings this morning, and happy to see that they met with her entire disapproval."

Mr. Carleton did not even glance towards Fleda, and made no answer, but carelessly gave the conversation another turn ; for which she thanked him unspeakably.

There was no other interruption of any consequence to the well-bred flow of talk and kindliness of manner on the part of all the company, that put Fleda as much as possible at her ease. Still she did not realise anything, and yet she did realise it so strongly that her woman's heart could not rest till it had eased itself in tears. The superbly-appointed table at which she sat,—her own, though Mrs. Carleton this morning presided,—the like of which she had not seen since she was at Carleton before ; the beautiful room with its arrangements, bringing back a troop of recollections of that old time ; all the magnificence about her, instead of elevating sobered her spirits to the last degree. It pressed home upon her that feeling of responsibility, of the change that had come over her ; and though beneath it all very happy, Fleda hardly knew it, she longed so to be alone and to cry. One person's eyes, however, little seemingly observant of her, read sufficiently

well the unusually shaded air of her brow and her smile. But a sudden errand of business called him abroad immediately after breakfast.

The ladies seized the opportunity to carry Fleda up and introduce her to her dressing-room and take account of Lady Peterborough's commission, and ladies and ladies' maids sooned formed a busy committee of dress and decorations. It did not enliven Fleda, it wearied her, though she forgave them the annoyance in gratitude for the pleasure they took in looking at her. Even the delight her eye had from the first minute she saw it, in the beautiful room, and her quick sense of the carefulness with which it had been arranged for her, added to the feeling with which she was oppressed; she was very passive in the hands of her friends.

In the midst of all this the housekeeper was called in and formally presented, and received by Fleda with a mixture of frankness and bashfulness that caused Mrs. Fothergill afterwards to pronounce her "a lady of a very sweet dignity indeed."

"She is just such a lady as you might know my master would have fancied," said Mr. Spenser.

"And what kind of a lady is that?" said Mrs. Fothergill.

But Mr. Spenser was too wise to enter into any particulars and merely informed Mrs. Fothergill that she would know in a few days.

"The first words Mrs. Carleton said when Mr. Carleton got home," said the old butler, "she put both her hands on his arms and cried out, 'Guy, I am delighted with her!'"

"And what did *he* say?" said Mrs. Fothergill.

"He!" echoed Mr. Spenser in a tone of indignant intelligence, "what should *he* say? He didn't say anything; only asked where she was, I believe."

In the midst of silks, muslins, and jewels, Mr. Carleton found Fleda still on his return; looking pale and even sad, though nobody but himself through her gentle and grateful bearing would have discerned it. He took her out of the hands of the committee and carried her down to the little library, adjoining the great one, but never thrown open,—*his* room, as it was called, where more particularly art and taste had accumulated their wealth of attractions

"I remember this very well," said Fleda. "This beautiful room!"

"It is as free to you as to me, Elfie; and I never gave the freedom of it to anyone else."

"I will not abuse it," said Fleda.

"I hope not, my dear Elfie," said he, smiling, "for the room will want something to me now when you are not in it; and a gift is abused that is not made free use of."

A large and deep bay window in the room looked upon the same green lawn and fir wood with the windows of the library. Like those this casement stood open, and Mr. Carleton leading Fleda there remained quietly beside her for a moment, watching her face which his last words had a little moved from its outward composure. Then, gently and gravely as if she had been a child, putting his arm round her shoulders and drawing her to him he whispered—

"My dear Elfie, you need not fear being misunderstood——"

Fleda started and looked up to see what he meant. But his face said it so plainly, in its perfect intelligence and sympathy with her, that her barrier of self-command and reserve was all broken down; and hiding her head in her hands upon his breast she let the pent-up burden upon her heart come forth in a flood of unrestrained tears. She could not help herself. And when she would fain have checked them after the first burst and bidden them, according to her habit, to wait another time, it was out of her power, for the same kindness and tenderness that had set them a-flowing, perhaps witting of her intent, effectually hindered its execution. He did not say a single word, but now and then a soft touch of his hand or of his lips upon her brow, in its expressive tenderness, would unnerve all her resolution and oblige her to have to reserve that time at least in letting her secret thoughts and feelings be known, as far as tears could tell them. She wept, at first in spite of herself and afterwards in the very luxury of indulged feeling, till she was as quiet as a child, and the weight of oppression was all gone. Mr. Carleton did not move, nor speak, till she did.

"I never knew before how good you were, Mr. Carleton," said Fleda raising her head at length, as soon as she dared, but still held fast by that kind arm.

"What new light have you got on the subject?" said he smiling.

"Why," said Fleda, trying as hard as ever did sunshine to scatter the remnants of a cloud,—it was a bright cloud too by this time, "I have always heard that men cannot endure the sight of a woman's tears."

"You shall give me a reward then, Elfie."

"What reward?" said Elfie.

"Promise me that you will shed them nowhere else."—"Nowhere else——?"

"But here—in my arms."—"I don't feel like crying any more now," said Fleda evasively; "at least,"—for drops were falling rather fast again,—"not sorrowfully."

"Promise me, Elfie," said Mr. Carleton after a pause.

But Fleda hesitated still and looked dubious.

"Come!" he said smiling, "you know you promised a little while ago that you would have a particular regard to my wishes."

Fleda's cheeks answered that appeal with sufficient brightness, but she looked down and said demurely,

"I am sure one of your wishes is that I should not say anything rashly."

"Well?"

"One cannot answer for such wilful things as tears."

"And for such wilful things as men?" said he smiling. But Fleda was silent.

"Then I will alter the form of my demand. Promise me that no shadow of anything shall come over your spirit that you do not let me either share or remove."

There was no trifling in the tone—full of gentleness as it was; there could be no evading its requisition. But the promise demanded was a grave one. Fleda was half afraid to make it. She looked up, in the very way he had seen her do when a child, to find a warrant for her words before she uttered them. But the full, clear, steadfast eye into which she looked for two seconds authorised as well as required the promise; and hiding her face again on his breast Fleda gave it, amid a gush of tears, every one of which was illumined with heart-sunshine.

THE END.

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